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# Concours d'entrée 2023

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## Annexe sujets

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**Anglais  
Série Sciences  
Humaines**

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**Épreuve d'admission : Analyse en langue étrangère d'un  
texte étranger hors programme**



## Will UK royals follow the Danish downsizing?

Sean Coughlan, Royal correspondent, *BBC News*, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2022

When Queen Margrethe downsized the Danish royal family was she setting an example that other royal families might follow?

The sensitivities of such a move were revealed when she had to apologise for the upset and "strong reaction" caused by removing royal titles from four of her grandchildren.

- 5 But the 82-year-old queen, now Europe's longest-serving monarch, stuck to her decision, saying that this was the "necessary future-proofing of the monarchy".

"This means difficult decisions must be made," she said. Particularly difficult for those losing their titles perhaps. But it's a move with other Scandinavian precedents. In 2019, Sweden's monarch, King Carl XVI Gustaf, removed royal status from five of his grandchildren. It was again with a nod towards  
10 the public mood of not wanting too many royals getting taxpayers' funding.

It might also be seen as an inevitable consequence of the hereditary and dynastic principle of monarchy. Family trees are often going to get bigger, with widening branches of children, grandchildren and relations. So, like clipping back a royal garden, every so often there will have to be a careful pruning of those defined as having royal status.

- 15 This reduced-scale approach in Denmark might be in tune with public opinion, with more than three-quarters supporting the monarchy. This is also a country where the level of public funding for the royal family - currently about £11m per year for the queen, her residences and staff - is linked to the pay index of Denmark's state-sector employees.

But could this be an example for the British Royal Family, with King Charles III long associated  
20 with calls for a "slimmed-down" monarchy? This has never been very specifically defined, but has been interpreted as a plan to focus more tightly on a smaller group of royals - sending a message of purposeful frugality.

It's like the wedding photograph with just the main participants rather than the group shot of whoever was there at the time. This slimming down might have already happened by default, with  
25 Prince Andrew, Prince Harry and Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex no longer carrying out royal duties or receiving public funding.

Buckingham Palace now uses the concept of "working royals" for a smaller group who carry out the round of visits, ceremonies and constitutional duties, distinguishing them from a wider range of royal relatives. The working royals include the King, Queen Consort, Prince William and Catherine,  
30 the Princess of Wales; Princess Anne; Prince Edward and Sophie, Countess of Wessex; Princess Alexandra and the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester.

Last year there were 2,300 official engagements carried out. Princess Anne on her own carried out almost 400. At the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations earlier this year, the distinction between working and non-working royals was visibly played out on the symbolic platform of the Buckingham  
35 Palace balcony. Prince Harry and Meghan, and Prince Andrew were not on the balcony to wave to the crowds. There were 18 royals on view - presenting much less of a crowd scene, when on occasions in the past there have been more than 40 people on the balcony. The reign of the new King has only just begun, but there are likely to be questions about how he might want to re-shape the monarchy and how the royal households will be run. Close to the issue of the size of the monarchy will be its cost to  
40 the public. The public funding of the Royal Family in Britain comes via the Sovereign Grant, which is based on a proportion of the profits from the independently-run Crown Estates. This pays for the running costs of the monarchy and its working royals - such as staff, travel, overseas visits, the upkeep of buildings, with £86m received last year, with extra costs from renovating Buckingham Palace pushing up overall spending to £102m. The Prince of Wales also has an income from the Duchy of  
45 Cornwall and the monarch has a private income from the Duchy of Lancaster. Slimming down the number of cash-hungry royal buildings, rather than the number of people, could be the biggest financial question. Repairs and refurbishments to Buckingham Palace alone cost £54m last year, more than half the total of expenditure.

## US-Mexico border park – a long way from the ‘pinky kiss’

*Christian Science Monitor*, by Sarah Matusek

May 30, 2023

Locals on the U.S.-Mexico border have long known Friendship Park as a space of unity. But times have changed, and the park, which links San Diego County and Tijuana, is under construction – and protest. In the 1980s, Ms. Martinez’s Mexican mother crossed the border unlawfully with her as a child to reunite with her father in the United States. The child grew into an adult who started her own family in the U.S. and built a life of her own over three decades there.

5 But Ms. Martinez was never able to change her unauthorized status. Since deciding to visit her mom back in Mexico in 2019 before she died, Ms. Martinez has not been able to legally rejoin her American family. “It was a big decision between my daughters and my mom,” says Ms. Martinez. “I just want to see them and hug them. ... I feel like I’m drained.” Her clothes match the colors of the country that won’t take her back: red-and-white blouse, blue denim vest.

10 Locals on both sides of the border have long known Parque de la Amistad, or Friendship Park, as an unofficial international meeting space. Family members without permission to cross once touched fingertips – to “pinky kiss” – through mesh. But access has evolved over the years, and the park is officially closed on the U.S. side.

[...]

15 The park represents a time capsule of border politics – and not just for its boundary marker, a white obelisk, established after the Mexican-American War. In 1971, first lady Pat Nixon, wife of Republican President Richard Nixon, inaugurated the surrounding area on the U.S. side, today known as California’s Border Field State Park, with visions of an international gathering space. “I hate to see a fence anywhere,” said the first lady, as quoted by the Associated Press. She crossed through a barbed wire fence to greet a crowd on the Mexican side. “I hope there won’t be a fence here very long.” By the 1990s, however, a Democrat – former President Bill Clinton – began to bolster

20 border security in the area to curb illegal crossings. Friends of Friendship Park convened in 2006 to advocate for more public access to the area, including after a second border barrier was built. The group looks to Peace Arch Historical State Park on the U.S.-Canada border as a model – a landscaped day-use park where visitors to the Washington state side don’t need to bring documents (but passports are recommended).

25 Friendship Park remains a site of protest and politicking. In 2018 on the California side, it’s where former Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the Trump administration’s family separation policy. The federal government, which has spoken with stakeholders, says it closed access to the area in 2019 due to personnel availability and barrier deterioration. Its construction project, scheduled to be completed this summer, calls for replacing primary and secondary partitions in the area with standard steel bollard fencing. The primary fence will include mesh on the north

30 side to prevent the passing through of contraband, according to Jason Givens, spokesperson for Customs and Border Protection. “Visibility through the fence will remain the same,” he writes in an email. “In our view, that violates President Biden’s campaign pledge when he said no new wall on the U.S.-Mexico border,” says the Rev. John Fanestil, a San Diegan. The minister is a founding member of Friends of Friendship Park, and began passing Communion across the primary border fence in 2008. Border Church began more formal services three years later.

35 Those on the U.S. side assembled between the primary and secondary walls under Border Patrol’s watch.

The U.S. government says it will resume such visits on the U.S. side, allowing for communication “with friends and family located in Mexico on the other side of the primary barrier as in years past,” according to a government statement in March. Mr. Fanestil and others consider the construction plans a visual and symbolic affront. “They’re

40 destroying the cross-border views and the cross-border experience of the space,” he says. “Most people visiting will not even recognize that there is a park.” Meanwhile, the Sunday tradition continues on the Mexican side. Rocky Hernandez, a deported U.S. veteran, comes early to set up the arrangement of tents and chairs. “I stopped going to work on Sundays,” says the hairstylist. “Just to come over here and help.” Others are drawn by a fellowship that welcomes visitors as they are – including asylum-seekers, beachgoers, and people living on the street. “This is the

45 truly most inclusive church I’ve ever been at, and I love that,” says Carol Clary, an American who retired in Tijuana. She doles out drops of hand sanitizer and welcomes those in line for a post-service lunch, typically tacos or tostadas. Yessenia claps along to a song on a guitar. The migrant from Guatemala says she’s grateful to receive donated clothes and toys offered at the gathering. “I know Brother Guillermo well, and he’s a good person,” she says, her ponytailed daughters by her side.

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Ms. Martinez, here alone, regards the waves where the border fence ends. Desperate for her daughters, she once considered crossing in low tide. Hope held her back. She recently learned that one of her daughters plans to visit soon. “You have to be very patient,” she says. Her eyes swell with oceans of their own.

## The return-to-office wars could end in a stalemate as we all reach the same conclusion about what the flexible future of work means

*Fortune*, by Byterri R. KURTZBERG and Mason AMERI  
May 30, 2023

5 The DNA of work has changed—or, rather, the point of engagement. A deadly virus sent us scrambling for safety, and jobs that didn't seem well suited for working from home (WFH) suddenly were happening in just that way—and more successfully than anticipated. Eventually, returning to the office (RTO) became possible, and many an executive declared that productivity relied on face-to-face interactions. But the workforce has spoken, and sitting in a cubicle for extensive hours five days a week isn't the way forward.

10 Battle lines have been drawn between the RTO and WFH camps. Some executives stand on their soapboxes and insist that the creative process happens only over the literal watercooler. Workers say that flexibility is a right and the most productive way forward. Ironically enough, both groups are leaning toward similar policies, with many requiring three days a week in the office and approving two from home. Even the extreme butts-in-seats chief executives often now push for 80% time in, not 100%.

15 The rhetoric on both sides is fierce, but the paths are remarkably parallel. Hybrid work it is. As advancements allow for more and more of a human feel in our online interactions, work location may become less relevant. In the meantime, when working remotely, we need to know what our work comprises and what criteria allow us to know whether it's done well. This is the holy grail. What makes us know that this job, another job, or *any* job, has been successfully completed?

20 Lately, we've seen a large variety of attempts to make hybrid work *work*. It turns out we've learned a few things about what doesn't work: It *doesn't* work to have employees commute to the office only to find themselves alone, logging into online meetings just as they would from home. It doesn't work to have some people on-site and others dialing in; the imbalance in being fully part of the conversation is apparent to all. It doesn't work for leadership to be in the office while technically “allowing” some to work from home: Those who show up will end up being favored, and everyone knows it. Some jobs, obviously, have to take place in person, but for vast swaths of the employment landscape, remote work is both possible and, often, preferable.

25 Without measurable outcomes (like a count of sales generated or vehicles repaired), success can feel abstract. Management by walking around has been a reliable crutch. We feel better when we see other people “working hard” while at the same time distrusting that those we can't see are working at all. We also enjoy the camaraderie of greeting each other and exchanging chitchat between meetings. We take security in what's familiar. Even the U.S. government is debating an RTO mandate.

35 Human exchanges aren't meaningless. Whether it's online or offline, we absolutely work better with people we know and trust, with whom we've developed an easy pattern of interaction. It's much easier to ask a colleague who feels like a friend for support on a work task. And we do get to know each other better in person. Technology hasn't yet arrived at the point where human interaction reliably builds relationships (despite the seemingly endless attempts at forced “share something about your weekend” conversations happening before video meetings). How much of that human connection is really necessary for the job? For the moment, the hybrid work movement seems to have decided that “more than none but not necessarily all five days a week” is a good enough answer.

40 However, productivity theater doesn't serve anyone well. The answer is goal-oriented management, job by job. Managers must define what success looks like and be able to recognize when the bar has been met or exceeded. In truth, this has always been the problem. It now also means the nuances of each job must be divided: Which tasks are suitable for remote work? How much co-presence is needed?

45 Once everyone can agree on the finish line, there is so much freedom to be had. Employees get to feel like they have some control over their work and home lives (and also escape the sometimes toxic office culture felt by many marginalized populations), and managers can cease tracking an employee's every waking minute online, or insist they sit in the office all day, every day. Hybrid work isn't new work, but it requires different strategies for accomplishing the same work under new circumstances.

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## Call for public to pledge their allegiance to King while watching coronation on TV mocked by critics

Nick Duffy, *inews* (www.inews.co.uk), April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023

A call for the public to swear allegiance to King Charles from home during his coronation has been met with warnings it could stoke anti-monarchist sentiment.

5 Coronation officials revealed on Saturday night that the Coronation would include the first-ever “Homage of the People”, replacing a part of the ceremony which traditionally sees peers pledge their allegiance to the monarch. Instead, those in Westminster Abbey, as well as royal fans watching on television, online or gathered in the open air at big screens, will be invited to recite a pledge to “pay true allegiance to Your Majesty, and to your heirs and successors according to law”.

10 Transport Secretary Mark Harper said he would be taking part. He said: “I’ve already pledged allegiance to the King (as an MP), I’m very happy to do so again and I hope people do... it’s a great opportunity to demonstrate all about our country that’s great, our fantastic values, and we can all get behind and support His Majesty, the King.” But the pledge will prove tricky for some of those inside the Abbey – not least Sinn Féin’s Michelle O’Neill, an avowed Irish republican who has said she will attend the coronation in her role as Northern Ireland’s first minister-designate. Sinn Féin MPs do not take up seats in the UK Parliament because of a refusal to swear a similar pledge.

15 Other politicians have also voiced objections. Green peer Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb said: “Asking us to chant our allegiance does seem an odd request when so many of us think that the monarchy is an outdated institution that needs drastic reform. And I really think that the king is rich enough to pay for his own coronation, not us taxpayers.” Former *Express* editor Martin Townsend was among pro-monarchy voices who raised concerns about the “very odd” step, saying it would “play into a lot of critics around the coronation”. He told GB News: “There is a little bit of

20 insecurity about it, and it also plays into the narrative about a slightly vain King. I’m a monarchist myself, but you have to be aware of where the dangers are.” Meanwhile, polling expert Professor Sir John Curtice said it was “certainly clear” that there is “not a great deal of support” for the monarchy among young people, adding that “the current generation of young people are particularly less likely to be keen on the monarchy than even 20 or 30 years ago”. Graham Smith of the campaign group Republic branded the step “tone-deaf”. He said: “This oath plan has been

25 widely mocked, and the chances of more than 0.001 per cent of the country taking this seriously are zero. With just 9 per cent of people enthusiastic about the coronation, this plan shows just how out of touch the royals are.” “In a democracy it is the head of state who should be swearing allegiance to the people, not the other way around. This kind of nonsense should have died with Elizabeth I, not

30 outlived Elizabeth II.” He noted that a reference to “heirs and successors” could be interpreted as including allegiance to Prince Andrew,

Duke of York, who is eighth in line to the throne. Mr Smith added: “This bizarre idea is likely to prove a huge miscalculation, one born of fear that the monarchy is rapidly losing support. They are doubling

35 down on the most archaic aspects of the coronation while trying to include everyone else in the most crass manner. This will not sit well with most people.” It was also confirmed on Saturday that non-Christian faith leaders will play an active role in the coronation service for the first time.

Leaders from Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, and Buddhist groups will deliver a greeting to the King in unison during the ceremony, while Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and Jewish peers will hand over items that of

40 cultural and religious significance outside of Christianity.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Justin Welby, said that the ceremony is “first and foremost an act of Christian worship” – but he will use a sermon to express hope that people of “all faiths and beliefs may live freely”.

## How Finnish schools teach every child to spot fake news – and what UK parents could learn from them

Ian Birrell, *inews* (www.inews.co.uk), May 24, 2023

Darja Rekani clearly remembers the day in primary school when a teacher showed a series of news reports before asking

the class of Finnish 10-year-olds to pick out the fake item buried among them and explain their choice.

“Then she told us, don’t always click on the first news you see and don’t believe everything you see on the internet – that was the most important thing in our lessons,” she says.

This was the start of teaching this set of young Finns how to traverse the turbulent and often toxic digital world so they can assess news stories, challenge conspiracy theories, handle data, see hoaxes and spot hate speech. Instead of abandoning them in an anarchic world filled with false prophets, phoney and propagandists, they are drilled in the skills to navigate safely through cyberspace.

10 Now, Darja is 17 years old and a pupil at Otaniemi lukio, a buzzing new secondary school with 1,150 pupils and a striking bear logo painted on its exterior in Espoo, the sprawling coastal city beside the capital Helsinki. Like so many teenagers, she is an avid user of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Tik-Tok, closely following discussions on politics and climate change, and admitting she spends up to 10 hours a day online.

15 However, that first lesson stuck in her mind. “I don’t believe everything I see,” says this affable young woman. “I double-check everything and only believe something if it is confirmed by other sources. I want to look a little deeper, search a little more and compare news. It takes time but it’s worth it.”

20 Topias Vakkilainen, also 17, underlines how these Finnish students have had it drummed into them to question data and information. “It is pretty basic stuff: check more sources, check a site’s sources, don’t trust only one page,” he says, adding that such scrutiny has become natural.

These are the children of Generation Z – digital natives of the post-truth age, brought up using the internet, social media, tablets and mobile phones from infancy. Yet in Finland, a country famous for having one of the world’s finest and most equitable education systems, they are taught critical thinking from an early age to help resist the flood of fake news and conspiracy theories.

25 The UK would do well to learn the lessons too. Democracies face increasingly fraught online struggles against dictatorships, fanatics and fraudsters, with artificial intelligence looming to make the fight even harder – so we need to do everything possible to equip our own children for the realities of the world in which they live.

30 So in art classes, pupils analyse images from advertising and discuss deep-fake videos. In history, they compare Allied and Nazi wartime propaganda. In maths, they discuss the use of algorithms and abuse of statistics. As in other parts of the school system, teachers are required to teach media literacy in a curriculum centred on critical analysis, but given discretion over the content of their lessons in a system without standardised testing and outside inspections.

35 Many used the Covid pandemic to examine conspiracy theories, and in recent months the Kremlin’s attack on Ukraine to look at state-led misinformation.

It is difficult to envisage such lessons in Britain, let alone in the increasingly politicised world of education in the United States. Yet such classes are seen as a cornerstone of the fight to defend freedom in Finland, a nation of just 5.5m people that shares an 830-mile border with Russia and was so alarmed by the invasion of Ukraine that it ditched long-standing neutrality to join Nato last month.

40 “We have to be on guard against disinformation,” says Aki Saariaho, an English teacher at Otaniemi lukio. “It’s a battle we must fight all the time.” Aki admits it can be hard for teachers to keep up with the latest trends and technology, pointing to the popularity of misogynistic influencer Andrew Tate among teen boys, along with the recent spread of pandemic conspiracy theories. He estimates about two-thirds of his pupils end up as diligent as Darja and Topias. The country’s public library system offers classes for older people to navigate the internet. Finland’s aim is not to establish “truths” but to arm citizens with the means to sift through the torrents of information found online, challenge falsehoods and come to their own informed conclusions.

And this approach has helped make Finland more resistant to fake news than any other nation in Europe, according to an annual survey of media literacy that put Britain in 11th place.

50 Another study of 46 nations last year by the Reuters Institute at Oxford University found Finland had highest levels of trust in news at 69 per cent of the population – and this figure had grown significantly over the previous

two years, despite the pandemic. Finland also has comparatively high trust in government.

## How a Weapon of War Has Worsened the Mass Shootings Epidemic

*Mother Jones*, by Mark Follman

April 1, 2023

It was a grim but not terribly surprising coincidence. Last Monday morning, just a few hours after the *Washington Post* published a new series on the popular semiautomatic rifles known as AR-15s, a suicidal 28-year-old used one to murder three children and three adults at a Nashville elementary school. It was the sixth mass shooting in the past 10 months committed with this type of highly lethal firearm, according to our *Mother Jones* database.

5 [...] The fast rising popularity of AR-15s—a civilian version of a rifle that was designed for maximum killing in war—drove booming overall gun sales. A *Mother Jones* investigation seven years ago into the secretive world of America’s 10 biggest gun manufacturers estimated an \$8 billion annual business. As we reported then, Remington Outdoor, the maker of the AR-15 used in the Sandy Hook massacre in 2012, saw its profits increase nearly thirtyfold over the 10 following year—with the biggest jump in sales coming from assault rifles. Today, the gun industry estimates that at least 20 million AR-15s are in circulation throughout the country, according to the *Post*. Nearly 14 million of those were manufactured by US gun companies over the past decade alone, generating sales revenues of roughly \$11 billion.

15 The *Post* series also spotlights the horrific damage that these weapons can do to human bodies big and small, like those of the three nine-year-olds gunned down in Nashville. The velocity and impact of the .223-caliber rounds can blast apart organs and demolish bones, as the *Post* illustrates with videos that are harrowing to watch even just as animated visualizations. The bodies of some children killed at Robb Elementary school in Uvalde, where 19 students and two teachers perished, were so obliterated that authorities had to resort to DNA testing to identify those victims.

20 Moreover, AR-15s have stark implications for law enforcement responding to mass shootings, as the *Texas Tribune* revealed recently with an important investigation into the catastrophe in Uvalde. A significant reason why police failed for an excruciatingly long time to confront the shooter, who was hunkered down inside a classroom with dying victims, was because they feared the firepower of his AR-15 and felt outgunned. According to the *Tribune*, multiple officers who spoke with investigators in the aftermath of the botched response said that they were unwilling to 25 confront the rifle on the other side of the classroom door. “You knew that it was definitely an AR,” said one Uvalde PD officer. “There was no way of going in... We had no choice but to wait and try to get something that had better coverage where we could actually stand up to him.”

30 Even by the standards of America’s woefully entrenched political battle over gun regulations, the response to these recurring massacres from various Republican lawmakers remains astounding. Texas Republicans apparently sought to bury the police fears about the shooter’s weapon in Uvalde, according to the *Tribune*: “A comprehensive and scathing report of law enforcement’s response to the shooting, released by a Texas House committee chaired by Republican Rep. Dustin Burrows in July, made no mention of the comments by law enforcement officers that illustrated 35 trepidation about the AR-15.” A month after Uvalde, state Sen. Bob Hall argued that the perpetrator’s firepower was irrelevant because “he had enough time” to kill the 19 children and two teachers “with his hands or a baseball bat, and so it’s not the gun.” At the national level, Republican lawmakers have been unanimous since the Nashville tragedy that they have no intention of strengthening regulations for AR-15s or other guns. A particularly shameful expression of their position came from Rep. Tim Burchett of Tennessee, whose district is home to the newly relocated 40 headquarters of Smith & Wesson (which manufactured the semiautomatic pistol used by the Nashville shooter.)

45 “We’re not gonna fix it,” Burchett told reporters on Capitol Hill. “Criminals are gonna be criminals.” He suggested that the only solutions might be a “Christian revival” or homeschooling children, as his own family does. “I don’t see any real role that we could do other than mess things up,” he said. He also recognized, awkwardly, the universality of the mass shootings scourge: “It doesn’t matter what state it’s happened in, we’re all Americans. It doesn’t matter the color of their skin, they all bleed red, and they’re bleeding a lot.” Burchett’s comments were in their own right remarkably frank. He simply was reinforcing the commonly espoused theme that “nothing ever changes” with this 50 problem, that there’s “nothing we can really do” about the epidemic of gun violence. It’s a national narrative that affirms outrage and despair, goes hand in hand with misguided blame on mental illness—and gives cover to politicians and others who profit from denying the fundamental role of ubiquitous, easily obtainable, highly lethal firearms.

The next mass shooting to occur somewhere in the country is almost certainly not a matter of if, but only when. And yet, the idea that we can essentially do nothing to stop it from happening stands as an insidious and damaging myth—one that America still, somehow, has yet to really confront.



## Step aside, Florida and Ohio. Georgia is ready to be a political battleground

NPR, by Sam Gringlas

December 16, 2022

Florida, Ohio, Virginia, Colorado: these were once perennial swing states. Now, a new pack of battlegrounds is emerging, including Georgia. Two years ago, Democratic candidates for president and Senate won Georgia for the first time in years. Then this November, Republicans swept every statewide race except for the Senate, where Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock prevailed in a runoff last week.

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So does this mean Georgia has arrived as a purple state, or at least a competitive one? "We are absolutely here to stay," says Rebecca DeHart, executive director of the Democratic Party of Georgia. "How many more cycles do we have to win to prove it?" On the heels of Joe Biden's 2020 victory in Georgia by about 12,000 votes, the Democratic Party is working to make Georgia an early primary state in 2024. Atlanta is also a finalist to host the next Democratic National Convention. "Georgia Democrats have always said our state will play a critical role in the national political landscape for years to come, and our state has been prioritized as such," DeHart says. Though Andra Gillespie, a professor of political science at Emory University, says pinpointing Georgia's political hue is still complicated. She thinks Georgia's electorate is not quite purple — maybe pink or lavender. Gillespie says Georgia's growth and diversity are shifting Georgia's politics, but notes, "demographics are dynamic. This question of, 'is Georgia pink or purple?' — it's going to take most of this decade to settle that question."

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Republicans still dominate the state government in Georgia. And in the U.S. Senate runoff, Republican football legend Herschel Walker lost by less than 3 points, despite his flaws as a candidate, including allegations of domestic abuse, a propensity for making false claims and his loose grasp of policy. "We need to be cautious about looking at behavior in this runoff election and trying to extrapolate other things from it, in part because Herschel Walker was such a unique candidate," Gillespie says. Warnock's campaign is credited with exploiting that dynamic by courting independent and moderate Republican voters with a message about bipartisanship, competence and character.

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Two years ago, Democrats eked out wins in another unique environment. Back then, Donald Trump was a prominent factor, repelling many swing voters with false claims about election fraud. So does that mean recent Democratic victories were exceptions, only possible in certain climates, or signs of a more lasting shift? "One of my friends used to say, 'If ifs and buts were figs or nuts, we'd all have a merry Christmas,'" says Republican strategist Cody Hall, standing near the towering Christmas tree in the state capitol's rotunda. "It doesn't matter really if it's a specific circumstance or not, they've been winning." Nearby is the office of Republican Gov. Brian Kemp. Hall was a top staffer on Kemp's campaign. This year, Kemp trounced his Democratic opponent, Stacey Abrams, by an even wider margin than their first matchup in 2018. Meanwhile, in a cycle otherwise good for Georgia Republicans, Walker floundered. "We have to get out of the mindset that it is still 2010, 2014 when you could slap an R next to a candidate's name and win by 8, 9, 10 points," Hall says. "If you nominate the wrong candidates, if you don't have the right message and you don't raise the money, you will lose."

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Years of organizing irregular and nonvoters helped catalyze that shift. Those efforts accelerated with Abrams' 2018 bid for governor, who was the first major candidate in Georgia to center that outreach in a statewide campaign. Helen Butler is executive director of the nonpartisan Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda, which has been working to register and engage voters since the nineties. "Years and years of work, yes definitely so," Butler says, gesturing toward the memorabilia plastered all over her office walls. Butler says she doesn't gauge Georgia's politics in shades of blue, red and purple. Instead, she looks at the roughly 1.6 million new registered voters since 2018, many of them voters of color. "I know that turnout is much better, and that's what we aim for," Butler says. "And I should say the participation rates are excellent." That participation has made Georgia more competitive. Even so, the November turnout rate fell from the 2018 midterms. "I know there are a lot of people of color who we registered to vote who didn't show up to the polls," Butler says. "So my interest is getting those people to make that next step." Whatever you call Georgia — purple, battleground, swing state — it will likely be at the forefront of politics in 2024 and beyond.

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## **'It's about damn time': College workers organize amid nationwide labor unrest**

*Politico*, by Bianca Quilantan and Blake Jones

February 4, 2023

5 Frustrated by low wages and new laws limiting what they can teach — and buoyed by President Joe Biden's pro-union bent — campus workers across the country are moving with new urgency to organize. A historic strike at the University of California kicked things off in November. And the six-week standoff among 48,000 campus workers, a broader surge in labor strikes across industries, a depleted pandemic workforce and a friendlier atmosphere in Washington has culminated in a wave of uprisings.

University of Illinois-Chicago faculty went on strike for four days last month. Hundreds of graduate students at Temple University in Philadelphia took to picket lines earlier this week. And the University of Washington averted a scheduled walkout by librarians and other campus employees in December just three hours before staff planned to hit the streets.

10 Workers are demanding increased wages, better health benefits, more job security and improved working conditions, and so far colleges are scrambling to meet them. "We have seen the past two to three years a lot of interest from higher ed workers organizing in states that do not necessarily have the collective bargaining rights or the ability to bargain with their employer on their wages and benefits," said Enida Shuku, an organizer with United Campus Workers who said the group is in discussions with several institutions about joining UCW.

15 Even in Southern states, including Tennessee, Arizona and Mississippi, organizers are pressing school leaders about pay and fights over free speech on college campuses. "We're all seeing it and experiencing it ... and it's about damn time," Shuku said. Graduate students typically double as employees for their institutions, teaching general education classes and working as lab assistants while pursuing their degrees. Many workers say they make below a living wage. At Temple, for example, the average graduate student worker can expect to make around \$19,500 a year. With union-friendly Biden in the White House, campus workers feel they have the extra leverage they need to unionize and strike.

20 Under President Donald Trump, campus organizers feared the Republican-majority on the National Labor Relations Board would use their cases to overturn a precedent that allowed graduate students at private universities to unionize, said Mark Gaston Pearce, who chaired the board under President Barack Obama. "Anything that required having to go through the board processes was avoided because they did not want to put the board in the position to weigh in relative to that question," said Pearce, who is now the executive director of the Workers' Rights Institute at Georgetown University. "Now — that no longer being an obstacle — it's not surprising that there is a flurry of organizing going on." In fact, Biden has been stocking the NLRB with commissioners who favor unionization among graduate students, something Trump administration appointees once considered banning altogether.

25 Boston University graduate students had backed off a unionization drive during the Trump administration, fearing a rejection from the board. But workers regrouped last fall, encouraged by a Democratic majority on the NLRB, and eventually voted to unionize in December. "With the shift in political landscape more recently, it kind of lightened the stressors of whether or not we'd be able to unionize to begin with and allowed us to have another go at it," said Alex Lion, a PhD candidate and organizer at the university.

30 UIC faculty almost went on strike in 2019, but the night before they were set to stop work, they agreed on a contract. Following "exhausting" semesters of online instruction, months of inflation chipping away at workers' earnings and a surge in labor action nationwide, faculty vacated lecture halls in January for four days before agreeing to a contract that will raise the lowest-paid employees' wages by \$9,000. "Across the nation, faculty and students everywhere are pretty exhausted," said Charitianne Williams, a UIC English professor and a member of the union's bargaining team. "I think that whether you're faculty union at UIC or in a union at Starbucks, that's a really difficult space to live in." Campus workers at the University of California got tens of thousands of dollars in raises, larger child care stipends and commuter benefits after weeks on the picket line. University of Washington's union was able to secure salary boosts and academic freedom protections in January, negating reason to strike.

35 Conservative critics, though, argue the successful labor wave could spread universities' resources thinner — forcing them to slash student worker positions or make other cuts — to afford the raises won during bargaining.

40 [...] Sarah Eldridge, associate professor of German at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, said while state laws do not allow collective bargaining, the union that represents all campus workers has managed to boost non-tenure track faculty pay by about \$9,000 in the last six years. Their graduate student union committee also recently won a fight to waive administrative fees that were being imposed on their stipends. But when the bill took effect, the union got fired up again.

45 Some tenured professors are looking to continue to protest the law each semester, despite pushback from state legislators. The union is now urging the university to increase campus minimum wage to \$20 an hour immediately, and to \$25 an hour by 2025. While campus workers can't officially go on strike in the state and don't have immediate plans to do so, Eldridge said: "Never say never."

## Silicon Valley Bank collapses, in biggest failure since financial crisis

*Politico*, by Sam Sutton and Victoria Guida

March 10, 2023

Silicon Valley Bank collapsed on Friday after a run on deposits drove the Northern California institution into insolvency, marking the largest bank failure since the financial crisis. SVB's stunning downfall, which threatens to upend the U.S. venture capital industry, is sparking fears that other small and regional banks could face similar pressure amid soaring interest rates and shrinking deposits. "We are looking at this closure of SVB as a sign of extremely concerning industry conditions," said Michele Alt, a former official at the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, a national bank regulator, and a partner at the advisory firm Klaros Group. "It's reminiscent of past crises. And what we're really focused on are banks with unrealized losses."

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and other policymakers are on alert that problems at the institution — which had \$209 billion in assets and counted more than half of Silicon Valley-backed startups and health-care businesses among its depositors — could spread. Yellen told Congress that she was keeping a close eye on the bank's financial crunch shortly before the California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation announced it had taken possession of the institution Friday morning. The FDIC seized control of the bank's assets, an unusual move suggesting that immediate action was necessary. "There are recent developments that concern a few banks that I'm monitoring very carefully," Yellen told lawmakers during a committee hearing. "When banks experience financial losses, it is and should be a matter of concern." After the bank's collapse, she convened the three federal banking regulators to discuss the fallout. "Secretary Yellen expressed full confidence in banking regulators to take appropriate actions in response and noted that the banking system remains resilient and regulators have effective tools to address this type of event," Treasury said in a press release.

The collapse sent the overall stock market tumbling. Shares of other regional banks, including First Republic Bank, PacWest Bancorp, Western Alliance Bancorp and Signature Bank, were frozen late Thursday with growing concerns of broader risks to the sector. Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.), whose Silicon Valley district includes both the bank and many of the venture capital and startup clients, urged the White House and Treasury to do "whatever is legally permissible & appropriate to support the Bank which is central to the startup & tech economy," he said in a tweet on Friday.

Silicon Valley Bank has been bleeding deposits as the Federal Reserve has aggressively raised borrowing costs to fight inflation. Higher interest rates bludgeoned many of the tech businesses that had deposited their money with the bank. As venture capitalists retreated from offering companies fresh infusions of capital to sustain their businesses, startups needed to burn through the cash in their accounts to stay afloat. Deposits the bank had on hand have fallen steadily over the last several months, according to S&P Global Ratings. Higher rates also meant more investments offered an attractive yield, leading some clients to pull out their deposits and put them elsewhere. In an effort to bolster its available cash, the firm sold off its securities portfolio and announced a stock offering, moves that contributed to panic about its financial health. Venture capitalists took to Twitter to alert businesses to start exploring alternative financing options, which contributed to the bank run that ultimately led to SVB's demise. SVB did not respond to a request for comment. The bank's swift descent into receivership comes after the implosion of Silvergate Capital — another California financial institution that fell apart after its crypto-focused clientele pulled their funds.

When banks run into trouble, they can be forced to sell off investment assets, typically U.S. government debt and mortgage-backed securities, that they purchased to earn a return on their customers' deposits. As interest rates climb, the price of those older securities fall — which means the banks sell those investments at a loss. Despite the SVB's high concentration of startup customers, markets aren't "gonna view Silicon Valley Bank as contained to Silicon Valley," Keith Noreika, a former acting Comptroller of the Currency and the executive vice president and chair of the banking supervision and regulation group at Patomak Global Partners, told POLITICO. Regulators and bankers are hopeful that the factors leading to SVB's failure are idiosyncratic and don't signal imminent problems at other financial institutions. It's rare for a larger bank to have customers so heavily concentrated in one sector, and more than 90 percent of those deposits were uninsured, according to its regulatory filings. (Deposit insurance is limited to \$250,000 per person per bank.)

Nevertheless, that might not offer much immediate comfort to cash-strapped businesses that didn't withdraw their funds from SVB during the panic earlier this week. "There's some hope that the depositors will eventually get their money back if they're over the limit. But the problem is, they won't immediately get it back. And what kind of stress does that put on the depositors and the industries in the meantime?" Noreika said.

## Tina Turner, Queen of Rock 'n' Roll, Left an Indelible Mark on Music History

*Smithsonian Magazine*, by Christopher Parker

May 25, 2023

Following the news of her death, tributes poured in from all corners of the entertainment industry. “How do we say farewell to a woman who owned her pain and trauma and used it as a means to help change the world?” writes Angela Bassett, who played Turner in the 1993 film *What's Love Got to Do With It*, on Instagram. “Tina Turner showed others who lived in fear what a beautiful future filled with love, compassion and freedom should look like.”

5

“I’m so grateful for your inspiration, and all the ways you have paved the way,” writes Beyoncé on her website. “You are strength and resilience. You are the epitome of power and passion. We are all so fortunate to have witnessed your kindness and beautiful spirit that will forever remain.”

10 Turner was the first woman, as well as the first Black artist, to appear on the cover of *Rolling Stone*. Known as the “queen of rock 'n' roll,” she is among the roughly two dozen artists to be inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame twice—once as a duo with her ex-husband, Ike Turner, in 1991, and then again as a solo act in 2021. (“If they’re still giving me awards at 81, I must have done something right,” said Turner in a speech following the 2021 induction.)

15 Anna Mae Bullock was born in Brownsville, Tennessee, in 1939. She got her musical start—and her stage name—in St. Louis, Missouri, from Ike Turner, who led a rhythm-and-blues band that she joined. The pair rebranded as Ike & Tina Turner and married in 1962. Throughout the '60s and '70s, they released a number of hits and endured a grueling tour schedule. Per the Associated Press’ Hillel Italie, Turner was forced to perform while ill or injured on many occasions.

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During those years, Ike subjected his wife to violent abuse. Tina escaped in 1976, “fleeing a Texas hotel room with nothing more than 36 cents and a Mobil credit card in her pocket,” writes the *Washington Post*’s Chris Richards. Following that fateful day, she began to speak publicly about her husband’s actions, and her openness served as an inspiration to many. “People still underestimate the cultural importance of Turner telling that story,” writes Rob

25 Sheffield in *Rolling Stone*. “Strange as it might seem today, she was the first star to talk aloud about domestic violence, to insist on it as part of the story, not to gloss over it or act coy. Until she came along, the idiom ‘domestic violence’ wasn’t even part of the language.”

30 Turner’s comeback in the 1980s is the stuff of legends; Sheffield contends that she “invented the whole concept of the comeback as we know it.” An integral part of that comeback was how she took charge of her identity and marketed her sound, as Maureen Mahon, author of *Black Diamond Queens: African American Women and Rock and Roll*, detailed in a 2021 discussion hosted by NPR’s Ann Powers and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture.

35 Mahon explained that Turner made a conscious choice to stop marketing herself as R&B, instead presenting herself as a rocker. Her clothing and hairstyles reflected this shift and became part of her iconic look. Compared to her musical contemporaries, Turner was an older artist with an older sound—a combination that worked in her favor. “Rock culture was still so stuck on the mythos of youth and newness that her '70s-retro concept was kinda ahead of her time,” writes Sheffield. “In a way, it’s an underrated Tina innovation: the Black grandma who invented dad rock.” The

40 second phase of Turner’s career allowed her to present herself to the world on her own terms. The hits from this era—including “What’s Love Got to Do With It,” which became the title of the 1993 film—cemented her superstardom.

Turner retired from performing in 2009, citing her age. But she remained a giant of the music world, and her influence shined through in artists such as Janet Jackson and Janelle Monáe. Her story of astonishing resilience and her ability to

45 forge her own path continue to resonate. Turner herself struggled with that story late into her life. She never watched *What’s Love Got to Do With It*, she revealed in a 2019 essay for *Rolling Stone*. “I was too close to those painful memories at the time, and I was afraid it would be upsetting, like watching a documentary,” she wrote. But when a musical about her life debuted in London in 2018, she found that she was ready to face those memories. “What happens on that stage has lost the power to hurt me,” she wrote. “I can sit back and enjoy the show.”

## What's a Luddite? An expert on technology and society explains

*The Conversation*, by Andrew Maynard

May 12, 2023

- The term “Luddite” emerged in early 1800s England. At the time there was a thriving textile industry that depended on manual knitting frames and a skilled workforce to create cloth and garments out of cotton and wool. But as the Industrial Revolution gathered momentum, steam-powered mills threatened the livelihood of thousands of artisanal textile workers. Faced with an industrialized future that threatened their jobs and their professional identity, a growing number of textile workers turned to direct action. Galvanized by their leader, Ned Ludd, they began to smash the machines that they saw as robbing them of their source of income. It’s not clear whether Ned Ludd was a real person, or simply a figment of folklore invented during a period of upheaval. But his name became synonymous with rejecting disruptive new technologies – an association that lasts to this day.
- 5
- 10 Contrary to popular belief, the original Luddites were not anti-technology, nor were they technologically incompetent. Rather, they were skilled adopters and users of the artisanal textile technologies of the time. Their argument was not with technology, per se, but with the ways that wealthy industrialists were robbing them of their way of life. Today, this distinction is sometimes lost. Being called a Luddite often indicates technological incompetence – as in, “I can’t figure out how to send emojis; I’m such a Luddite.” Or it describes an ignorant rejection of technology: “He’s such a
- 15 Luddite for refusing to use Venmo.” In December 2015, Stephen Hawking, Elon Musk and Bill Gates were jointly nominated for a “Luddite Award”. Their sin? Raising concerns over the potential dangers of artificial intelligence.

- The irony of three prominent scientists and entrepreneurs being labeled as Luddites underlines the disconnect between the term’s original meaning and its more modern use as an epithet for anyone who doesn’t wholeheartedly and unquestioningly embrace technological progress. Yet technologists like Musk and Gates aren’t rejecting technology or innovation. Instead, they’re rejecting a worldview that all technological advances are ultimately good for society. This worldview optimistically assumes that the faster humans innovate, the better the future will be. This “move fast and break things” approach toward technological innovation has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years – especially with growing awareness that unfettered innovation can lead to deeply harmful consequences that a degree of responsibility and forethought could help avoid.
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- 25

- In an age of ChatGPT, gene editing and other transformative technologies, perhaps we all need to channel the spirit of Ned Ludd as we grapple with how to ensure that future technologies do more good than harm. In fact, “Neo-Luddites” or “New Luddites” is a term that emerged at the end of the 20th century. In 1990, the psychologist Chellis Glendinning published an essay titled “Notes toward a Neo-Luddite Manifesto.” In it, she recognized the nature of the early Luddite movement and related it to a growing disconnect between societal values and technological innovation in the late 20th century. As Glendinning writes, “Like the early Luddites, we too are a desperate people seeking to protect the livelihoods, communities, and families we love, which lie on the verge of destruction.”
- 30
- 35 On one hand, entrepreneurs and others who advocate for a more measured approach to technology innovation lest we stumble into avoidable – and potentially catastrophic risks – are frequently labeled “Neo-Luddites.” These individuals represent experts who believe in the power of technology to positively change the future, but are also aware of the societal, environmental and economic dangers of blinkered innovation.
- 40 Then there are the Neo-Luddites who actively reject modern technologies, fearing that they are damaging to society. New York City’s Luddite Club falls into this camp. Formed by a group of tech-disillusioned Gen-Zers, the club advocates the use of flip phones, crafting, hanging out in parks and reading hardcover or paperback books. Screens are an anathema to the group, which sees them as a drain on mental health.
- 45 I’m not sure how many of today’s Neo-Luddites – whether they’re thoughtful technologists, technology-rejecting teens or simply people who are uneasy about technological disruption – have read Glendinning’s manifesto. And to be sure, parts of it are rather contentious. Yet there is a common thread here: the idea that technology can lead to personal and societal harm if it is not developed responsibly.
- 50 And maybe that approach isn’t such a bad thing.

Keir Starmer hasn't really called time on North Sea oil and gas – here's why  
[Gavin Bridge](#), Professor of Geography and Fellow of the Durham Energy Institute, Durham University, [Gisa Wieszkalnys](#), Associate Professor of Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science

*The Conversation UK*, June 7, 2023

Keir Starmer recently announced that the UK will grant no new licenses for oil and gas firms to drill in the North Sea if Labour wins the next election. It's a decision that would terminate the UK's 60-year policy of offering up new areas of the North Sea for fossil fuel extraction. The Labour party has promised to clarify its energy policy later this month. The plan has been  
5 criticised, for different reasons, by oil industry figures, union officials and politicians. But how consequential is it? Labour's challenge to the offshore industry is part of a broader public debate in the UK about what a desirable future looks like with a worsening climate emergency and after half a century of domestic extraction. Longstanding principles of offshore oil and gas policy – such as maximising the recovery of hydrocarbon fuels which it is cost-effective to  
10 pump – are being challenged in court. Opposition parties and trade unions demanded oil and gas companies pay a windfall tax while consumers are saddled with high energy prices. The independent Climate Change Committee, which advises the UK government on meeting its emissions targets, supports the end of oil and gas exploration – and the Scottish government has embedded a similar position in its draft energy strategy. Denmark, France and Ireland  
15 have already declared a halt to licensing and pledged a managed phase-out of oil and gas production. The International Energy Agency found that no new oil and gas fields (beyond those already approved for development) are required to meet demand under a scenario in which the world reaches net zero emissions by 2050. Evidence of the need for rapid cuts to the amount of fossil fuels being extracted and burned is mounting. There is even a financial case for it, as fossil fuels and the infrastructure that produces them risk becoming massively  
20 overvalued stranded assets as demand falls and prices rise in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Labour's reported position on licensing, then, is not a bolt from the blue. Starmer said in January, while on a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos, that oil and gas would play its part during that transition – “but not new investment, not new fields up in the  
25 North Sea, because we need to go towards net zero, we need to ensure that renewable energy is where we go next”.

### **What's in the pipeline?**

Labour's plan would draw new licensing to a close, but it would not end oil and gas production. There have been 33 licensing rounds since the mid-1960s, the primary means by which oil  
30 and gas companies gain access to the seabed on the UK's continental shelf. The most recent opened in October 2022 and its outcomes have yet to be declared. Large reserves of oil and gas are already covered by existing licenses and await decisions by the companies who hold them on whether to develop them. A Labour spokesperson has clarified that it would not touch this substantial pipeline of projects, and that “existing licences will continue and using existing  
35 wells sensibly is baked into our plans”. For anyone concerned about climate change, this is a major problem. Pressure from Greenpeace and allied climate campaigners is building on the regulator, the North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA), to withhold consent – especially for large-scale projects such as Rosebank and [Cambo](#). From the Scottish government's perspective, declining production in the North Sea offers a glide path for a “just transition” from  
40 a fossil fuel economy.

### **Will Sunak go for broke?**

The immediate question is whether the government will seek to drive a big licence giveaway to lock in as many new fields as possible before a future Labour government ends licensing. It's  
45 possible. The UK prime minister, Rishi Sunak, has described the idea that the UK will not develop further offshore oil and gas fields as “economically illiterate”. When the current 33rd licensing round opened in October, Liz Truss called for 100 licenses to be made available and 115 bids were received from 76 companies. The NSTA is expected to announce very soon what licences will be awarded.

## How cashless societies can boost financial inclusion – with the right safeguards

[Thankom Arun](#), Professor of Global Development and Accountability, University of Essex

*The Conversation UK*, June 7, 2023

Cashless societies, where transactions are entirely digital, are gaining traction in many parts of the world, particularly after a pandemic-era boom in demand for online banking. Improvements in digital payment infrastructure such as mobile payments, digital currencies and online banking, make it more convenient for people and businesses to buy and sell things without using cash. Even the Bank of England is looking into how a digital pound might work, showing the potential for a significant shift from physical cash to digital payments in the UK. Fintech companies have accelerated the transition towards cashless payments with innovations including mobile payment apps, digital wallets, cryptocurrencies and online banking services. The COVID pandemic was also a tipping point that created unprecedented appetite for digital transactions. Fintechs emerged as a life line for many during lockdowns, particularly vulnerable populations that needed emergency lines of credit and ways to make and receive payments. By 2021, approximately 71% of adults in developing countries had bank accounts. But this leaves nearly 30% of the population still needing access to essential financial products and services. Fintechs can provide more affordable and accessible financial services and products. This helps boost financial inclusion, particularly for the “unbanked”, or those without a bank account. In the UK, around 1.3 million people, roughly 4% of the population, lack access to banking services. The government and financial institutions have worked together to promote the adoption of digital payments, and the UK’s Request to Pay service allows people and businesses to request and make payments using digital channels such as Apple Pay and Google Pay. But other countries are moving faster towards a cashless society. In Sweden, only about 10% of all payments were made in cash in 2020. This move towards cashless payments in the country has been facilitated by mobile payment solutions like Swish, which people can use to send and receive money via mobile phone.

### Boosting financial inclusion

India has gone even further. In less than a decade, the country has become a digital finance leader. It has also made significant progress in promoting digital financial inclusion, mainly through the government’s flagship programme, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY). India’s banks also participate in mobile payment solutions like Unified Payments Interface (UPI), which can connect multiple accounts via one app. India’s digital infrastructure, known as the India Stack also aims to expand financial inclusion by encouraging companies to develop fintech solutions. Many developing economies are using digitalisation to boost financial inclusion in this way. Kenya introduced its M-Pesa mobile money service in 2007. While microfinance institutions that provide small loans to low-income individuals and small businesses were first introduced in Bangladesh in the 1970s via the Grameen Bank project. Digital lending has also grown in India in recent years. Its fintechs use algorithms and data analytics to assess creditworthiness and provide loans quickly and at a lower cost than traditional banks. These innovative platforms have helped to bridge the gap between the formal financial system and underserved populations – those with low or no income – providing fast access to financial services. By removing barriers such as high transaction costs, lack of physical branches and some credit history requirements, fintech companies can reach a wider range of customers and provide financial services that are tailored to their needs. It’s the tech behind these systems that helps fintechs connect with their customers. The increased use of digital payment methods generates a wealth of data to gain insights into consumer behaviour, spending patterns and other relevant information that can be used to further support a cashless society. Countries like the UK could also promote digital financial inclusion to help unbanked people. But this would require a combination of government support, innovation and the widespread adoption of mobile payment solutions. There are some significant challenges to overcome to create a true – and truly fair – cashless economy. For example, a cashless system could exclude people who do not have access to digital payment methods, such as the elderly or low-income populations. According to a recent study by Age UK, 75% of over 65s with a bank account said they wanted to conduct at least one banking task in person at a bank branch, building society or post office.

Providing more cashless options could also increase the risk of cybercrime, digital fraud such as phishing scams and data breaches – particularly among people that aren’t as financially literate.

How universities could help whole communities tackle climate change

Arinola Adefila, *The Conversation UK*, June 7, 2023

5 As centres of learning, universities have the potential to help whole communities learn about and address climate change. Education can lead us to change our attitudes and behaviour. It can also help us deal with the anxiety or fear of doom that can stun us into inaction. But there are aspects of how universities work that can create a divide between them and the communities that live and work around them. Universities could anchor climate collaboration. While many already take part in outreach work, they need to do more to build community links and use the resources they already have more widely. Universities can be seen as elite institutions that do not welcome people who are not educated in a particular way, or those who have different ways of thinking about knowledge and beliefs.

Ivory towers

10 There are barriers to entering a university. These include grade requirements for students, or qualifications for lecturers and researchers who teach and develop new knowledge. It is more difficult for some people, such as those with a disability, to navigate these barriers. Even if events that are open to all are held at a university, it may seem like a closed-off or unwelcoming place for people in the local community. This means that most people on the planet are not able to engage with or contribute to essential learning and discussion taking place in higher education about the climate crisis. This separation is extremely unhelpful when dealing with such a multifaceted issue with layers of complexity. It is what is known as a “wicked problem” – addressing one facet of the issue may result in further complications elsewhere. It requires people to work collaboratively to solve local challenges, while also thinking about implications on the global level. The conversations around tackling climate change are too often fragmented. Researchers and universities discuss technological solutions. Governments focus on social innovation and activists on behaviour change. But we need to collaborate. Working together as planetary citizens is the key to ensuring we can tackle the wicked problem of the climate crisis.

Valuable resources

25 Universities have the technological, practical, and social resources to support the critical element of collaboration. They have cultural capital, meaning that people will pay attention to events and initiatives launched or developed with a university. They have the clout to spur communities, business, and policy makers to accelerate coordinated action. They have staff with expert knowledge who can share this knowledge. They have the infrastructure and proficiency to create learning sites and spaces, as well as community engagement. Universities have the physical space to allow people to meet, discuss and learn, and the online learning facilities to do this virtually. To put this into practice, universities need to do more to build connections with their communities. This could mean involving the local community in their day-to-day practice of teaching and research. Learning can take place beyond the campus, so that university students and staff partner with local communities in the practice of carrying out research. And universities can – and should – do more to promote learning for everyone. With the advent of online tools, universities have all the ingredients to support lifelong learning focused on collaboration. Higher education institutions could design courses focused on sustainable living. They could train community educators to work with local residents and provide campus events on sustainable living involving people from the community. The university learning environment is designed to support the development of “epistemic agency”: assuming control of our own learning and the development of our own understanding. Epistemic agency is a fundamental feature of our humanity and a useful tool to be deployed to enhance collective responsibility in tackling wicked problems. Universities could support the epistemic agency of whole communities, not just students. Universities cannot independently solve the climate crisis. But as custodians and producers of knowledge, universities have the characteristics and resources to support collaborative learning and collective action.

Arinola Adefila

45 Associate Professor in Education and deputy director of Staffordshire Centre for Learning and Pedagogic Practice, Staffordshire University. Arinola Adefila has received from the British Council, AdvanceHE and the Office for Students to examine learning environments, learning resources and learning content.



Windrush compensation scheme: how the UK government is failing its citizens with this 'belittling and horrible' process

Shaila Pal, Director of Clinical Legal Education & Senior Lecturer, King's College London

*The Conversation UK*, June 2, 2023

5 The Windrush scheme was set up in 2018 to provide documentary confirmation of British citizenship and residency rights for the Windrush generation and other commonwealth citizens, and their children. This came in the wake of the growing scandal that had seen the Home Office, as a result of Theresa May's hostile environment policy, repeatedly refuse existing residency rights to many people whose home had been the UK for decades. In announcing the scheme, then home secretary Amber Rudd apologised for her government's appalling treatment of the Windrush generation. People had suffered devastating harm. They had lost jobs and homes, and been deprived of healthcare. Many had been threatened with deportation. Some were deported to countries they had not visited since early childhood. In the five years since, however, this scandal has only deepened. The UK government set up the Windrush compensation scheme in 2019, to allow victims of the Windrush scandal to claim compensation for any losses suffered as a result of being denied the right to live in the UK. But even as the wider process has revealed the true impact of historical racist immigration laws, the compensation scheme has been marred by delays and controversies. Crucially, it has largely lost the trust of the people it was set up to serve. Despite extensive scrutiny and repeated calls for reform – from the all-party law reform and human rights organisation Justice, a home affairs select committee, the independent person appointed in 2021 by the government to assess the Windrush compensation scheme, and campaigners – very little change has occurred. In April 2023, the NGO Human Rights Watch said: *[The scheme] is failing and violating the rights of many to an effective remedy of human rights abuses suffered. I work in the Windrush Justice Clinic alongside community groups, law centres including Southwark Law Centre, and several universities. We help victims receive the compensation they deserve through legal casework, outreach and policy reform. My research compares the Windrush compensation scheme with other such schemes in a bid to gauge its effectiveness. The fact that the perpetrator of the harm caused – the Home Office – has primary responsibility for decisions and the rules of this scheme is a fundamental design flaw.*

#### A humiliating process

10 In January 2022, Vincent McBean – an ex-serviceman who arrived in the UK from Jamaica with his brother Edwin when he was eight – sought help from the Windrush Justice Clinic. McBean's children were born in the UK and lived here for a number of years, before he sent them to Ghana for their early schooling. Since 2010, he has been trying, unsuccessfully to bring them back. Vincent McBean's British citizenship was only recognised through the Windrush scheme in 2019, and his brother's was not recognised until July 2022. This long delay saw Edwin denied the care and supported accommodation he has needed subsequent to a lengthy hospital stay after contracting COVID. The impact on the family has been devastating, and both brothers are seeking compensation. As Vincent puts it: *I have been forcibly separated from my children for many years and watched my brother suffer. Edwin lived in a cramped room completely unsuited to his health needs. There were points he had no carers, so I had to do everything for him, which also impacted my health. When I tried to resolve the situation, I found the system belittling and horrible. If you can imagine, I fought for England – [yet] I was treated like a second-class citizen.*

#### 40 A flawed system

The failure of the Windrush compensation scheme to deliver justice is down both to how it was designed and how it is being delivered. To Vincent's mind, it is too complicated and bureaucratic, designed to stop people claiming compensation.

45 The application form is 44 pages long. The exacting standard of proof for claims has been somewhat revised, but applicants are still expected to provide extensive evidence to demonstrate the loss they have suffered – a standard that legal experts have likened to the criminal standard of proof. In April 2023, for example, Human Rights Watch reported that victims were being told letters from local councils demonstrating periods of homelessness were not deemed sufficient.

Charles III is a good bloke, says Malcolm Turnbull, but Australia's former prime minister still thinks his country should become a republic

*The Economist*, May 3rd 2023

There is mention of Australia in Charles III's several coronation oaths; the only one of his 15 realms that is specifically mentioned is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The other 14 are swept up in an omnibus reference to "your other Realms and the Territories to any of them belonging or pertaining", all of which Charles will promise to govern "according to their respective laws and customs". This is hardly surprising. In 1953, just before the coronation of Charles's late mother, Robert Menzies, Australia's prime minister, said that she "sits on the throne not because of some law of Australia, but because of the law of the United Kingdom". Indeed, the Australian constitution of 1901 gave enormous power to the monarch—Victoria at the time, but extending to "Her Majesty's heirs and successors". By 1901 the British monarch was very much a constitutional one, bound to act on the advice of her ministers. But in Australia it was a different story. The new Commonwealth of Australia was not, nor sought to be, an independent nation. The extensive powers vested in the queen in the Australian constitution were designed to be exercised by the government in London.

Over the years that followed, Australia acquired more autonomy. By the time Elizabeth became queen in 1952 Australia had become an independent nation. "Today King Charles, in exercising his authority under our constitution, acts solely on the advice of the Australian government." But while the Crown had ceased to represent imperial authority over a subordinate dominion, it was its very British character that gave it meaning to Australians. "Wherever we may be in the world we are one people. One "British" people, that is. The word 'British' means to us as much as it does to the people of the United Kingdom itself and of New Zealand and Canada. It means the British tradition of government under which every member of this Parliament pledges his faith and allegiance to the monarch." In 1954, when Queen Elizabeth made her first, rapturously received visit to Australia, the Australian government's Yearbook noted: "The non-indigenous population of Australia is fundamentally British in race and nationality."

No longer. Australia is the most successful multicultural society in the world. Nearly 30% of all residents were born overseas, and of them only 14% come from the United Kingdom. The fastest-growing migrant communities hail from India, China and elsewhere in Asia. Australians generally regard Britain with affection, but nobody regards it as "home" in the way the older generation did. By the end of Elizabeth's reign Australians did not see in her a symbol of a shared British identity. In a changing world she was, however, the embodiment of continuity, and in that sense a reassuring stability. There were always more Elizabethans than monarchists.

Australia's only referendum on becoming a republic, held in 1999, was lost because republicans split over how the new president should be appointed. The model proposed would have had him or her chosen by a bipartisan majority of Parliament. Many republicans, however, argued that the president should be directly elected; allowing the perfect to be the enemy of the good, they voted No. And so the monarchy survived: 55% to 45%. Later this year, "we will return once again to the question of the republic. Learning the lesson from 1999, we should hold an advisory plebiscite to resolve the mode of election first, and then incorporate that decision into the formal referendum on amending the constitution". This time it will be vital that the public are directly involved in the design of the amendment. Over the years polls have tended to indicate a slender majority in favour of a republic. There was a decline in support after the death of the queen, but the latest polls put the republic ahead again. Success, however, is not assured. Australians are conservative when it comes to their constitution. Australia's system of compulsory voting enhances this conservatism, because the uninterested or uninformed—who are more likely to reject change—don't have the option to stay at home.

With the Elizabethan era now history, what can Charles III represent to Australians today? Most Australians who know the king like and respect him. His enduring dedication to the environment and sustainability strikes a chord with young people and his wry self-deprecation is equally endearing. But being a good bloke isn't enough. Australia's head of state should be one of us.

## A migrant crisis partly of the UK government's making

William Wallis, *The Financial Times*, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022

Suella Braverman, UK home secretary, was already in trouble last weekend when circumstances on the English coast put her further under fire.

Some 1,500 migrants had taken the perilous journey across the Channel to England in small boats.

Some of them were present when an English man threw petrol bombs at a Home Office facility at

5 the port of Dover on Sunday, an incident now being investigated by counter-terrorism officers.

In the wake of the attack, hundreds of people were hurried on to the migrant processing centre at

Manston which was already overcrowded, with diseases including diphtheria spreading through

the facility. The events have put a spotlight on the Conservative government's tough talk on

asylum seekers and illegal immigration and weak record in designing policy that meets the stated

10 aim of securing UK borders while keeping migrant numbers and costs down.

Charities and immigration lawyers have said that persistent problems within the asylum system were

of the government's own making, and while some solutions — such as speeding up decision-making on

applications — are obvious, they are inconsistent with the government's hostile approach.

“Ministers have deliberately focused on making the system harsh and austere rather than focusing

15 on putting resources and capacity in place to treat people with compassion and respect,” said Enver

Solomon, chief executive of the charity Refugees Council.

Braverman, who is facing serious criticism for allegedly failing to heed legal advice about the

prolonged detention of migrants at Manston, described the asylum system as “broken” and illegal

immigration as “out of control” when she was defending herself in parliament on Monday.

20 The Manston facility has a maximum capacity for 1,600 migrants but this week was holding around

4,000 in conditions described by the chief inspector of borders and immigration David Neal as

“wretched”.

Some detainees had been held there for more than a month, he said, while a separate prisons

25 inspectorate report, released on Tuesday, exhorted the government to “get a grip” of the situation.

The findings described exhausted refugees without beds sleeping on floors with “no fresh air or

place to exercise”.

Whitehall officials have accused the home secretary of worsening the situation by deliberately

failing to procure alternative accommodation to ease the overcrowding. Braverman has denied

the accusations. But immigration minister Robert Jenrick admitted on Tuesday that asylum

30 seekers were being held at the centre for more than the 24 hours allowed by law, and said that

the sheer numbers of people crossing the Channel this year had “overwhelmed” the state's

capacity to respond. Jenrick predicted that a record 50,000 people would make the Channel

crossing in small boats by the year's end, compared with just 300 in 2018 and nearly twice the

numbers for 2021.

35 “This is a crisis,” he said. “We will, I am afraid, now need to look at some more radical options to

ensure that our laws are appropriate, that economic migrants are returned swiftly and that we deter

people from coming to the UK,” he said.

Yet, at least part of the problem has been caused by the government's obsession with designing

systems of deterrence to try to break the business model of people smugglers and halt their traffic

40 across the sea, according to charities and lawyers.

Priti Patel, the former home secretary in Boris Johnson's cabinet, toyed with deploying wave machines

and gunboats

to push migrants back to the French coast, before alighting on her controversial Rwanda policy.

Her agreement with the government in Kigali is designed to bolster provisions in the new Nationality

45 and Borders Act passed this year making people entering the UK by unofficial means, including by

boat across the Channel, inadmissible for asylum claims.

Under the proposal, some asylum seekers landing on the English coast would be sent straight to

Rwanda, where in return for an initial payment of £120mn the government agreed to host some of

those making claims.

50 But the policy has been stalled by legal challenges and has contributed to gumming up the

immigration system all the way back to Manston, contributing, said charities, to a backlog of

asylum application claims that now stands at more than 100,000, according to Home Office figures

## Slave traders' names are still stamped on native plants. It's time to 'decolonise' Australia's public gardens

Brett Summerell, *The Guardian*, Friday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Like all botanic gardens, the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney is a classic artefact of the activities that took place during the colonisation of Australia in the 18th and 19th century. It was established to create a patch of landscape that mirrored those found in the United Kingdom, with the aim of “discovering” and documenting the floral biodiversity of New South Wales (in itself a name reflecting the perspective of those holding power). Of course, this was powered by the economic driver to find plants that held potential for new and existing industries – a scenario that was mirrored across Australia and throughout the world by colonial forces of the time. As a result, the names of effectively all Australian plants were defined by white – primarily male – botanists, based on the presumption that they were not known by humans prior to their discovery. Many are named using Latinised terms to describe various features or locations, and a number are named after (usually white male) politicians or patrons.

We are finally becoming more aware that this is a preposterous scenario. My colleague Dr Kevin Thiele recently highlighted the case in which the plant genus *Hibbertia* is named after George Hibbert, who made his fortune from slave trading. Aboriginal people have a level of understanding about, and a connection to, the plants in their environment that is detailed and advanced, based on thousands of years of exploration, analysis and observation. Over that period, they have had the opportunity to observe and record how species change in response to the environment, cultural management practices, grazing by herbivores and, through experimentation, how different species could be used for the benefit of their community. Scientists such as myself still get excited by “discovering” new species – it is something we do each year and a core component of our organisation's role. We do this mainly because we hope to protect these species more effectively before they are subjected to land clearing or the ravages of climate change-induced drought or fire and become extinct.

Botanic gardens and museums are rightfully beginning to reflect on this and there is a great deal of commentary on “decolonising” collections across the globe and how this might happen. A starting point is to ensure that the Indigenous perspective on nature, and in our case plants, is a core component of both our displays, plantings and educational programs. We have had very successful Indigenous education programs at the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney for some time. Plant signage is starting to reflect Aboriginal names as well as the Latin version to educate the visitor about how Indigenous people used these plants. But there is still much to do, particularly given that botanic gardens are usually located in places that hold significance to local Aboriginal communities.

Enhancing the involvement of Aboriginal people in our science programs is much more complex – and is an issue that affects all fields of science. Programs such as Deadly Science, run by Kamilaroi Stem expert Corey Tutt, are doing great things to inspire a love of science from an early age in Indigenous kids and should result in a cohort of scientists in the future.

For now, we need to explore and expand opportunities to increase the involvement and recruitment of Aboriginal scientists in a meaningful way (and not tokenistic or a tick-the-box exercise) across the whole of the science and research sectors. This is critically important in sciences focused on the natural world as these are the areas likely to have an impact on the care and management of Country into the future and which need the input of Aboriginal people to be appropriate and meaningful.

Additional initiatives could include using names based on Indigenous languages – done in consultation – when describing new species. When working on Country do so in collaboration with the Indigenous community, wherever possible spend time in that community and approach the research in a humble manner without the assumption that “conventional science” knows best. It is also critical to ensure that outputs such as authorship on research papers and reports reflect this collaboration appropriately. We cannot change the past 250 years of science in Australia or the legacy of approaches that dismissed Indigenous knowledge and contribution. However, we can adopt a new approach that incorporates this knowledge and perspective in a meaningful manner that can result in a more effective way in which our ecosystems are respected and managed.

- Dr Brett Summerell is chief scientist of the Australian Institute of Botanical Science

## Beware *The Crown's* blurring of fact and fiction in this age of dangerous untruths

Simon Jenkins, *The Guardian*, Friday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2022

Thirty years ago, the present king tried to usurp his mother, the Queen. He sought to conspire with the then prime minister, John Major, after an opinion poll hostile to the monarch appeared in the *Sunday Times*. Like all the scenes in Netflix's *The Crown*, this is claimed to have been "inspired by real events".

In truth there was no such plot, no conspiracy and no poll hostile to the monarchy. A fictional storyline was put into the mouths of living people and then introduced as "the story of the political and personal events that shaped the Queen's reign".

I carry no brief for the royal family. The institution has shown it can handle the strain of being the butt of inaccuracy and ridicule. For their part, *The Crown's* apologists shrug and excuse it as entertainment, a sceptical portrayal of celebrities to be taken with a pinch of salt. It enjoys a licence to lie that is granted to all docu-dramatists: that they are "artists". The show's creator, Peter Morgan, has adopted a different defence. He admits to "forsaking accuracy but not the truth". His consultant Robert Lacey seems to be stretching things when he writes under the headline, "Never a truer word was said of the royal family".

*The Crown's* approach to accuracy ill-conceals a different excuse, that depicting famous people on screen lends a plausibility to any plot, however weak. It titillates the audience with familiarity. So what if Prince Philip was still alive when *The Crown* implied, on no evidence at all, that he had been unfaithful to the Queen? It made a better story than if he had been a fictional prince.

At one level, making money out of being offensive or cruel to living people is commonplace. They are usually rich, and can always sue if they think they've been libelled. We might add that the British royal family brought it on themselves when they decided in the 1960s to project themselves as high-profile celebrities, in pointed contrast to the discretion of Europe's other hereditary monarchs.

More serious is the abuse of the word "truth". The series has had its poignant moments, but it is blatantly biased against the monarchy. The royal biographer, Hugo Vickers, has noted that many of the falsified scenes are derogatory about the royal family. It claims to be a "fictionalised dramatisation" of reality but it cannot have seriously researched the truth, as did Hilary Mantel in her Thomas Cromwell trilogy.

People believe accounts of reality portrayed on television. Roughly a third of Americans believe Donald Trump's claim that his presidency was "stolen" by Joe Biden. They have seen it on television, with confirmatory "evidence" on social media. That is why lies are so dangerous. Look also at Owen Matthews' wise new book on Ukraine, as seen from Moscow's standpoint, *Overreach*. It shows Russians strongly supporting Vladimir Putin's view of the war as the result of Nato aggression. They have been told it relentlessly on television and so it must be true.

I accept that these are real people and not just actors peddling fiction. But a casual disregard for truth is the same wherever it occurs. Accounts of real, historical people cannot depend for their veracity on the vigour of the liar or the plausibility of the actor. The maxim remains the same, that a lie encircles the globe while truth is still getting on its boots.

I am sure Britain's royal family will survive this reputational blitzkrieg. Biographers have already had a field day deconstructing *The Crown*, and if millions of viewers are misled, too bad. The status of truth is a more fragile casualty. Academic historians and (most) journalists do not see it as their task to distort or glamorise contemporary events by spicing them with lies. The policing of stories about living individuals is subject to a mix of libel law, literary reputation and journalistic ethics. Publishers hire lawyers and factcheckers. The mainstream media has long offered an editorial filter between events and their readers and listeners, one that remains appreciated by the latter. Social media has shredded that editorial filter. Regulation of information of all sorts is in its infancy. That is why art cannot be licensed to rewrite history as it sees fit. *The Crown* should have opened with a screaming health warning: "The following events depicted in this drama did not take place ..."

My mother took bus rides to stave off the loneliness. There must be a better way

Yvonne Roberts, *The Guardian*, Sun 7 May 2023

On a Sunday, if there were no family visitors, my late, independently minded mother, in her 80s, would get on a bus to stave off that creeping sense of depressing isolation, particularly associated with weekends, bank holidays and special occasions, a time when everyone else appears to be happily bonded in the company of others.

5 On the bus, for an hour or so, going wherever it took her, she would meet others similar in age to herself to pass the time of day, exchange neutral comments on the weather and the cost of a perm, and return home, cheerier, topped up by a little human connection. Some people are desperately lonely.

10 According to the Campaign to End Loneliness, 25 million people say they are occasionally, sometimes or often lonely – and they are those brave enough to be honest. Equally alarming, figures published last month indicate that, for the first time, those between 16 and 29 are twice as likely to report feeling lonely often or always (9.7%) than those aged over 70. While among those aged 30 to 49, 8.2% report feeling lonely compared with only 3.7% of the over-70s. The scale of isolation is a warning.

15 Post-Covid, volunteering is in sharp decline. In addition, pubs are closing, church attendance is down, community spaces, youth clubs, children’s centres, nurseries, day centres, recreation parks, swimming pools, anywhere people can meet, make friends, open up to worlds beyond their own, has been savaged first by austerity cuts and now by the cost of living crisis. The long hours of employment and commutes has also depleted the numbers of those who were  
20 once willing to lend a hand in their spare time. When civic society is razed in so many ways, loneliness spreads fast. Something has to be done.

In the US, last week, Dr Vivek Murthy, the surgeon general (the nation’s doctor), said that loneliness was a public health emergency, affecting one in two Americans. Its impact is as serious as addiction and obesity, and is the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day.  
25 The late neuroscientist Professor John T Cacioppo, co-writer of *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, explained how isolation also has an impact on heart disease, depression, anxiety and dementia, while “it limits our ability to internally regulate our emotions – all of which can combine to trap us in self-defeating behaviours that reinforce the very isolation that we dread”. In contrast: “Connection adds more water to the well that  
30 nourishes our human potential.”

So how are England and Wales tackling this silent enemy of good health and wellbeing? We do have a minister in charge of loneliness – Stuart Andrew – but who would know? The latest annual report, published in March, bafflingly says: “We will continue to remind people that it is OK to feel lonely.” It also helpfully provides a list of those groups most likely to be affected by  
35 loneliness. They include young people, women, unemployed people, those who have recently moved – no one is excluded.

However, this is inadequate. On the one hand, we have the continuing damage to the social fabric created by government incompetence and policies, while on the other we have the loneliness “strategy” and its attempt to darn a few holes. It won’t work.

40 In contrast, in the US, Murthy understands that loneliness is about every aspect of society – economic, social, structural. “Service is a powerful antidote to loneliness,” he told BBC News, but it needs an ecology that fosters, not handicaps it. Murthy’s framework includes investment in public transport, education, youth services, libraries, green spaces. It expects more from employers and tech giants, better research and innovation to encourage families and friends  
45 to switch off social media and reconnect.

Of course, currently, in many UK communities, giving back and reaching out happens all the time, although it may not be formally labelled as volunteering. But even in these areas built on service, kindness and reciprocity, there will be well-hidden individuals deeply distressed by their soul-destroying solitariness. So, how can they be reached?

## Britain isn't a nation of slackers – we're on the clock 24/7 and we deserve the 'right to disconnect'

Owen Jones, *The Guardian*, Wednesday, 24 May 2023

The idea of a clear demarcation between work and life is, for most people, an absurd joke: your life is being invaded, and you have no line of defence to protect yourself. Even if they are thousands of miles from their desk, a worker may still feel chained to it. Text messages and emails can arrive at ungodly hours, demanding prompt replies. Parents may find the nightly ritual of putting their kids to bed is interrupted by a panicked phone call from their boss. Almost as stressful is the idea that, as you collect your belongings to leave the office, you know you can never really leave: somehow, wherever you are, you remain at work. Here is why “the right to disconnect” has become one of the great emancipatory causes for workers, and could be headed for Labour’s next manifesto. For example, Portugal introduced a law at the beginning of last year that

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imposes a legal duty on bosses not to contact their workers outside of defined working hours. There is one exception – circumstances of force majeure – but otherwise, companies could be fined up to €9,690 (£8,400). In part, this is a response to the phenomenon of working from home: in Britain, 37% of employees now report working from home at least some point in the previous week. While this trend has been liberating for many workers, the Portuguese authorities found it could be exploited by bosses disregarding the idea that a remote worker ever clocked off. This reality of always being on call directly contradicts the idea that British workers are slackers, which has become gospel among the political right. In their 2012 manifesto, *Britannia Unchained*, Liz Truss, Dominic Raab, Kwasi Kwarteng and Priti Patel declared that “once they enter the workplace, the British are among the worst idlers in the world”, squarely blaming our country’s productivity crisis on its employees. Three years before her calamitous seven-week stint as prime minister, Truss denounced workers as needing “more graft” and suggested that they lacked “the skill and application” of their foreign counterparts.

This defamation of British workers has no bearing on the truth. Last year, British workers put in £26bn worth of freelabour: that meant 3.5 million workers did unpaid overtime, representing over £7,000 of unpaid work. Contrary to stereotypes spread by rightwing newspapers, unpaid overtime is most

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common in the public sector. The damage to workers can be profound. One Australian study in 2020 found that a fifth of university staff were expected to respond to work-related messages, phone calls and emails after work. Over half sent work-related messages in the evening, and 30% over the weekend. Seven in 10 who experienced these out-of-hours intrusions reported psychological distress. The majority with intrusive bosses reported feeling emotionally exhausted. It’s not just mental health that is at stake. Those with intrusive employers were twice as likely to report physical symptoms such as headaches and back pain.

The so-called British idler worker is at breaking point. This isn’t only inflicting damage on workers. It is also driving a misconception among bosses that they are more likely to profit from overworked employees. Yet last year, 17m days were lost to work-related stress, depression or anxiety. Indeed,

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stress, anxiety and depression account for a narrow majority of all cases of work-related ill health.

Other countries outside of Portugal have introduced laws that aim to redress this. In 2018, a French court fined the British firm Rentokil €60,000 for breaching workers’ “right to disconnect”. That the British Labour party – which is not exactly awash with transformative policies – is considering such a law should be applauded. The right to disconnect must be just a first step. When many citizens enter

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their workplaces, they are no longer free. Their liberties and rights are suspended and everything from their speech, clothes and mannerisms are monitored. Many workers are placed under constant surveillance with new software and technology, itself a cause of stress. The world of work is despotic. While some bosses may use their autocratic powers with benevolence, others do not.

Introducing more democracy into workplaces could reduce the stress suffered by disempowered

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workers. Recently, many companies took part in a pilot for a four-day week that proved a huge success and clearly demonstrated the benefits of rolling back the frontiers of work. Human existence is short indeed, its enjoyment curtailed by our subordination to the whims and needs of our managers. Loosening their grip will free us all.

## **Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes turns herself in for 11-year prison term**

*The Guardian*, by Kari Paul

May 30, 2023

The Theranos founder Elizabeth Holmes has turned herself in for an 11-year prison sentence, marking a final chapter in a years-long fraud saga that riveted Silicon Valley. The 39-year-old tech founder walked into the minimum-security, federal women's prison camp located in Bryan, Texas, on Tuesday afternoon. Footage captured from outside the facilities shows that she was accompanied by an escort, was not handcuffed and wore a casual outfit. Holmes  
5 appeared in good spirits, smiling as she entered the building.

Holmes had been out on bail since she was indicted on fraud charges in 2018 over her role as the head of the failed blood-testing firm. She was convicted in November 2022 on four counts of defrauding investors and sentenced to 11 years and three months in prison. Under federal law, Holmes is required to serve 85% of the time, even if her sentence  
10 is reduced for good conduct. Federal prison camp Bryan, where Holmes has been ordered to serve her sentence, houses primarily white-collar and non-violent female federal prisoners, and lacks the fencing and strict rules of higher-security prisons. It is a work-focused program that requires all inmates to hold a job for a minimum of 90 days.

Holmes had attempted to delay serving her sentence, arguing that she should be able to remain out of custody while  
15 she seeks a new trial based on alleged wrongdoing by the the prosecution. The US district judge Edward Davila denied those requests, stating that a new trial or an overturning of the guilty verdict was unlikely. Holmes reportedly spent her final days of freedom with her partner, Billy Evans, and their two children. Her trial was originally delayed as she gave birth to her first child in July 2021 and she appeared at her sentencing hearing in November pregnant with her second child, who was born in March. Sunny Balwani, Holmes's former business and romantic partner, was  
20 convicted on all 12 counts of fraud he was charged with, and in April began his 13-year sentence at a prison in California.

The imprisonment of both Theranos figureheads marks the end of the dramatic tale of Theranos – a company Holmes founded in 2003 after dropping out of Stanford University at 19. She promised a revolutionary technology that could  
25 run hundreds of health tests on just one drop of blood, amassing millions of dollars in funding from big-name backers like the former secretary of state Henry Kissinger and media mogul Rupert Murdoch. Theranos was valued at more than \$10bn at its peak in 2014, until reporting in the Wall Street Journal in 2015 revealed shortcomings in the company's core technology – leading the institution to quickly unravel. By 2018, Theranos had dissolved. John Carreyrou, the reporter who broke the story for the Journal, responded to Holmes reporting to prison on Tuesday,  
30 tweeting “Bad Blood, the final final chapter”, a reference to his book of the same name.

The dramatic trial of Holmes lasted 18 weeks, featuring testimony from high-profile Theranos investors including the former defense secretary James Mattis. Throughout the proceedings, the defense team painted Holmes as an ambitious and naive young founder who was unaware of the extent to which Theranos's technology was malfunctioning. Before  
35 her sentencing, Holmes expressed regret for letting down “the people who believed in us”. “I am devastated by my failings,” she said. “Every day for the past years I have felt deep pain for what people went through because I failed them. I regret my failings with every cell of my body.”

The harsh sentencing – much longer than the 18 months of house arrest requested by Holmes's team – is thought to  
40 have set a new precedent in Silicon Valley and its hype cycle that enabled Theranos to garner as much success as it did with so few checks and balances. Holmes, meanwhile, has embarked on a campaign to rehabilitate her image, breaking seven years of media silence with an extensive profile in the New York Times on her new life as “Liz” – a devoted mother who has abandoned her signature baritone speaking voice. She will face three years of supervised release after her sentence ends and has been ordered to pay \$452m in restitution to victims of the fraud.



## The legacy of Nancy Pelosi

*The Hill*, by John A. Lawrence

November 18, 2022

The decision of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) to step down from her leadership position provides an important opportunity to assess the legacy of the first woman to lead the legislative branch of our government. When Pelosi arrived on Capitol Hill, many dismissed her as the personification of the “San Francisco liberal” Democrat that conservatives had castigated. After three and a half decades of legislative achievements and skilled political helmsmanship, no one doubts her historical significance.

Pelosi leaves many legacies, aside from being the first of her gender to hold the gavel. Indeed, her record of recruiting a diverse collection of women and minorities to run for Congress and aggressively elevating them to key committees and leadership positions assures that the impact of her time as speaker will influence the House permanently.

Although often accused of a rigorously partisan and bareknuckle approach to politics, Pelosi frequently and sincerely extolled the value of finding common ground, believing that bipartisan legislation was more enduring and preferable to one-party governance or ephemeral executive orders. “It’s always better to govern from the middle,” she told president-elect Barack Obama in 2008. She collaborated with Republican presidents with whom she had profound policy disagreements in addressing the 2008 financial collapse or the COVID crisis of 2020, encouraging her members to cast politically perilous votes because of the severity of the crisis. Concerned about creating a distraction that jeopardized policy objectives, she resisted her own caucus’s demand to impeach George W. Bush for distorting intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction — and hesitated to take action against Donald Trump until the evidence compelled a congressional response.

Pelosi would often observe that “Washington is a perishable city,” by which she meant that the power conferred by voters is often fleeting, and leaders could not “wait for the slowest ship” before acting. She has been a fierce advocate for her side of Capitol Hill, reproaching those who assumed it was easy for her to find the votes to pass legislation. She did not hesitate to chide those who minimized her challenges, as she did when telling President Obama in 2010, “You don’t respect the House!” or George W. Bush whose veto threats were an affront to the House’s demands for constraints on spending in Iraq. Still, she bowed to the reality that often, the approach favored by the House faced obdurate barriers in the Senate or White House. Nowhere was that more the case than with the Affordable Care Act in 2010. While she preferred a more sweeping version of the health law, she refused to allow divisive issues — from abortion to the public option to regional repayment formulas — jeopardize Democrats’ best chance in decades of passing a health care law. “If you don’t have 218 votes,” she would remind aspirational colleagues, “you’re just having a conversation,” and Pelosi’s goal was always to legislate.

[...]

Pelosi would go the extra mile to accommodate a member whose vote she needed, often agreeing to office meetings well past midnight to hear out a disappointed colleague. She strolled through the Minnesota State Fair wearing cowboy boots, jeans and munching a pork chop on a stick with conservative Democrat Collin Peterson to secure his vote on a key energy provision. “I have to have the bill,” she told the Agriculture chairman. “And I *will* have one. I have the votes without you.” Such attention to member needs meant that during periods of large majorities and small, as well as when in the minority, no one achieved greater unity. Pelosi used those unparalleled skills to pass sweeping legislative achievements under both Republican and Democratic presidents: stimulus under Bush and Obama; financial and auto rescue; energy efficiency; lobbying and ethics reform; health care; a visionary infrastructure program; human rights safeguards at home and around the world, and a massive investment to fight climate change. True, the scope of the legislation was not always what she had sought, but she embraced the axiom of the great British political philosopher, Sir Mick Jagger: You don’t always get what you want, but you get what you need. And no one knew better what her members need.

What seems a bit strange is that after two exhausting decades of leading the party, so many are questioning why Pelosi chose to depart. Those of us who worked alongside her — members and staff — have endured her indefatigable pace for years: long days on the floor and the conference room, late night negotiations, weekends traveling to multiple states for fundraising, recess trips to battle zones and strategic partners to assess the state of our international relations. Perhaps then it is not so surprising that, with a Democrat in the White House, a Democratic Senate and the tiniest of margins in the House, she decided this was the time to give others the opportunity to lead.

Fortunately, a new generation of diverse and skilled leaders has been elevated by the Caucus and has spent crucial years honing the skills needed to manage the disparate Democrats and hone them into a unified party. Will the new leaders be as skilled as Nancy Pelosi? They would doubtless be the first to admit her high heels are difficult ones to fill, but that is the nature of political change, and change is very much what Nancy Pelosi has wholeheartedly embraced.

## For American workers, generative AI threatens an already unstable future

*The Hill*, by Joseph Chamie

April 5, 2023

Are tech companies moving too fast in rolling out powerful artificial intelligence technology that could one day outsmart humans? That is the conclusion of a group of prominent computer scientists and other tech industry notables who are calling for a six-month pause to consider the risks. The AI genie of artificial general intelligence, or AGI, which reportedly is close to being able to do anything the human brain can do, cannot be put back in its bottle and may soon become uncontrollable, greatly impacting the lives of Americans.

In their recent open letter warning of the potential risks of AGI, more than 1,000 luminaries in the artificial intelligence field say the development of AGI is out of control and evolving systems with human-competitive intelligence pose profound risks to society and humanity. They are calling for a moratorium on systems above a certain capacity for at least six months. In addition to the letter, articles are sprouting up across the media landscape concerning the worrisome and unsettling consequences of AI. Many top academics and researchers have expressed concerns that there is about a 10 percent or greater chance of human extinction due to future advanced AI systems. But long before that, the demographic group expected to be impacted the most is the global workforce.

Various organizations and workers, especially those with white-collar jobs, have expressed concerns that AI may cause severe job disruption, making many of their activities obsolete and taking over their jobs. Recent research indicates that AI could affect the work tasks of approximately 80 percent of the U.S. workforce; about 166 million men and women. Also, one survey reported that 62 percent of job seekers said they were concerned that AI could derail their careers.

This comes during a time when demographic and economic headwinds are transforming the labor force. More than 50 percent of U.S. adults age 55 and older said they had retired due to COVID in a 2021 Pew Research Center survey. More recently, record inflation has forced many others to reconsider their plans, with 40 percent of workers over 45 reportedly expecting to delay retirement due to increased expenses. Additionally, many women working lower-income jobs without college degrees are still recovering from COVID layoffs that heavily impacted their sectors. Reportedly, 1.6 million fewer women were in the workforce in January than there were in February 2020.

It's clear, now more than ever, that Americans still need to work. However, recent research estimates that generative AI could automate a quarter of the work done in the U.S. One generative AI model, ChatGPT, had more than 1 million users in just five days after its launch in November and now has 25 million people using it daily. As generative AI contributes to labor cost savings, adds new jobs and increases productivity, it is raising the chances of a productivity boom, but could also raise the chances of a labor crisis.

That said, many of the darkest predictions about generative AI may be overblown. Considering all that human intelligence has already done to the planet's climate, environment, wildlife, natural resources and the impact of pollution, it's difficult to imagine how artificial intelligence could do worse with respect to the survival of the world's 8 billion human inhabitants.

Given America's dismal record in addressing global warming, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and other major problems facing the country, it's difficult to see how the U.S. will be able to control the development of AI systems with human-competitive intelligence that could pose profound risks to society and humanity. Open letters to governments in the recent past from thousands of scientists warning of untold suffering and declaring a climate emergency have had relatively little effect on America's policies. This isn't a great sign for the potential impact of the AGI open letter. But lawmakers are paying attention. Two years ago, Congress created a new government office, The White House AI Initiative Office, to coordinate AI research across government agencies and direct an interagency task force to develop a strategic plan with research priorities, ethical concerns and environmental issues.

At the start of this year, the National Artificial Intelligence Research Task Force (NAIRR) presented its final report to the president and members of Congress. That report provides a roadmap for establishing a national research infrastructure that would broaden access to the resources essential to AI research and development.

As the U.S. government encourages further AI development by the private sector, it's clear that there's no turning back on the technology. What is not at all clear is whether America will be able to control its rapid evolution.

## Britain can do better than being a delusional Don Quixote over wind farms

Donnachadh McCarthy, *The Independent*, 7 December 2022

We were the only nation on earth at COP 27 whose government supported a continuing ban on offshore wind farms. The UK government's 2015 ban on the installation of onshore wind farms perfectly represents the democratic, economic and climate shambles of current UK climate policy.

5 Despite being the outgoing UN COP president, we were the only nation on Earth at the conference whose government supported a continuing ban on onshore wind farms. The global south delegations, facing devastating humanitarian and economic impacts from unfolding climate destruction, showed remarkable restraint in refraining from shouting down Rishi Sunak's glib platitudes.

10 Wind is the cheapest form of electricity on the market, around nine times cheaper than the current price of electricity generated in gas-fired power stations. The Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU) estimates that without the ban, onshore wind could have electrically powered another 1.5 million homes this winter, cutting dependence on soaring fossil gas markets and £800m from consumer bills.

15 Some Tory MPs, led by former minister Simon Clark, tabled a proposal requiring the government to change planning guidance. This amendment would allow local planning committees to grant permission for new wind farms where they have local support.

The ban is a democratic shambles. It flies in the face of majority support for wind farms across the public, political, industrial and media worlds. A recent YouGov poll found that a 67 per cent majority of the public support them, including 65 per cent of rural voters and even 66 per cent of Tory supporters! Only 15 per cent opposed the lifting of the ban.

20 Sam Hall, director of the Conservative Environment Network, told this column: "Onshore wind would strengthen our energy security and lower bills. It was brilliant that 20 members of our parliamentary caucus signed the amendment.

25 It rightly contains a strong local consent mechanism to ensure it won't be forced on communities who don't want it." The CBI (Confederation of British Industry) also supports the lifting of the ban, citing it as an example of how the government was blocking green economic growth.

It was originally introduced by the Cameron government, following a concerted campaign led by the *Mail* and *Telegraph* to ban onshore wind farms. The only exception to the ban in England is for solitary domestic-sized wind-turbines under 11.1 metres, which are permitted development.

30 However, the raw self-harm to the British economy seems to have finally seeped through to some former media opponents. *The Sun* issued an editorial demanding an end to the ban, as did the *Telegraph's* City Editor.

One of the few Tory MPs to express opposition to lifting the ban John Hayes MP, who declared that wind farms are "stealing the legacy of the landscape for generations to come".

35 And finally, there is Rishi Sunak who supported the ban in his first leadership campaign, bizarrely stating that wind farms cause "distress and disruption". But the 2019 Tory manifesto is silent on onshore wind, other than a commitment to continue supporting renewables.

40 In response to the amendment, the government yesterday announced a "consultation" on weakening the ban, but not abolishing it. It looks set to retain many of its destructive features, including require a local council to have formally designated an area for wind energy before a developer can submit a planning application, and a more onerous proof of public support than just the usual vote of the democratically elected planning committee. The group RenewableUK state that doubling onshore wind by 2030 could add £45bn of growth to the economy, with 27,000 well-paid jobs and cut a staggering £16bn from consumer bills in the intervening years. And crucially, it would cut six million tons of CO2 per year. Onshore wind is now so cheap, it needs no state subsidies. But it does need the national grid infrastructure to be ready to connect its farms to the grid.

45 It really would be a democratic outrage if Rishi Sunak's "consultation" retains most of the restrictions in an attempt to keep both wings of his party united. The government does not need to pass legislation to end the ban. It can just simply tweak the National Planning Policy Framework to do so.

50 Britain must stop being the lone Trumpian Don Quixote\*, aiming our lances at non-existent windmill demons! It is not only shameful in a global climate crisis – it's embarrassing.

## The government may come to regret taking a 'light touch' approach on AI

Editorial in *The Independent*, 4 May, 2023

In the classic 1968 sci-fi movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the onboard talking computer, HAL 9000, mutates from highly intelligent articulate utility to murderous quasi-human, a nightmarish scenario that shows signs of coming true. In the film, the terrified human crew try to turn off HAL (which stands for Heuristically programmed ALgorithmic computer, a sort of artificial intelligence machine), but it proves resistant to restraint. It is a situation that HAL's designers didn't quite foresee. This is roughly what humanity and its governments are now facing with the sudden rise of artificial intelligence.

Even those most closely associated with the new technology have been surprised by its rapid development, and by its ability to generate everything from poetry to convincing-looking photographs to journalism. In an echo of the aforementioned sci-fi film, even pausing the large language models (LLMs) that lie behind formidable AI software such as ChatGPT and Bard seems a hopeless task. Such LLMs are able to educate themselves at a rate far faster than humankind, because once one AI-enabled computer learns something, all the others do. That is the power of AI, and it has launched itself upon the world like the atom bomb in 1945. Hitherto, the British government, spying a rare "Brexit opportunity", has favoured a "light-touch" approach to the new technology, in the hope of making the UK an "AI superpower". This looks set to change, however. The government has announced a wide-ranging review of the impact of LLMs and AI. The Competition and Markets

Authority will assess competition and consumer protection issues for companies using the technology, while other regulatory issues are to be devolved to the existing relevant watchdogs that oversee human rights, health and safety, and so on, rather than creating a new body dedicated to the technology. This seems an inadequate initial response. There is a cosy assumption, embodied in the official "AI superpower" ambition, that AI is similar in quality to other revolutionary new technologies – steam power, electricity, mass production, flight, nuclear energy, and indeed computing, information technology and the internet.

That means that jobs will be created as well as destroyed, and, on balance, the latest scientific wonders can still be controlled and directed by humans. Yet the power of LLMs is of a different quality and order of magnitude to what has passed before, and the much-desired influx of jobs may not be created after all, because the LLMs are the ones that will be doing the work, and at a faster rate than any human can. The brighter possibility is the final arrival of the kind of "leisure society" envisaged by the likes of John Maynard Keynes, HG Wells and Aldous Huxley, where the old challenges of increasing output and prosperity through human effort – the creation of wealth – are dissolved by the rise of the machines. Of course, it will be some time before even the dancing robots of today will be able to work in a care home or carry out a heart transplant, but the outlines of a brave new world are beginning to show themselves. It may in the end prove difficult to regulate the new technologies, but it seems odd that ministers have decided to pursue such a prosaic and piecemeal approach to AI, given the enormity of what is already here. The dangers are clear. LLMs are no more immune to error than old-fashioned early computers. If they are collating, interpreting and learning vast amounts of language and information, then that doesn't make their "judgements" sound. To use a rather old but serviceable expression, the computers are prone to the problem of "rubbish in, rubbish out". And once LLMs learn moral or factual "rubbish", how do they "unlearn" it? Given such questions, there is a strong case, as with the challenges of the climate crisis, new medicines, and nuclear proliferation, for some form of international regulatory framework. We are some way away from that, which is worrying given the speed at which LLMs are developing. That is the essence of the warning from the "godfather of AI", Geoffrey Hinton, who recently resigned from Google. To him, the AI chatbots are "quite scary": "Right now, they're not more intelligent than us, as far as I can tell. But I think they soon may be." So far, the British government still seems to think that an uncoordinated "light touch" across myriad regulators is all that's needed to keep an eye on things. The HAL of tomorrow may have different ideas.

## End the romance of Thanksgiving, as a great Pequot scholar argued two centuries ago

*The Los Angeles Times*, by Peter C. Mancall

November 22, 2022

In November 1620 the Mayflower deposited about 100 Pilgrims at the Wampanoag community of Patuxet, which the newcomers renamed New Plymouth. A year later, the English and Wampanoags enjoyed a three-day feast. For generations, Americans have celebrated that meal as the first Thanksgiving.

5 As traditions go, Thanksgiving seems pretty secure, though the recent redefinition of Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day suggests that even once-sacred holidays can change. Columbus trotted through American culture until 1992, the 500th anniversary of his first voyage. That year, Native and other scholars fueled a campaign to redefine the holiday by emphasizing Columbus' role in brutal conquest, enslavement, and ecological catastrophe. But this was not the first effort to redefine America's origins.

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In the 1820s and 1830s, a Pequot minister named William Apess took aim at what would become Thanksgiving — arguing that the nation needed to rethink the colonization of New England, and view it through Indigenous perspectives. What does it mean when a nation extracts a benign interpretation of the past from a tangled and often violent legacy of encounters and conflicts? Indigenous peoples' experience of conquest and colonization pivoted on

15 dispossession. Shouldn't that be part of the story too?

Apess tackled these questions at a time when prominent politicians linked the Pilgrims' experience with two hallmarks of American democracy: the right for any community to govern itself, and the right for individuals to practice their faith without government interference. In the era of Indian removal, these notions became embedded in the federal government's efforts to expand the nation westward into lands held by Indigenous peoples whom the Constitution excluded from exercising such rights. In 1829, Apess' "A Son of the Forest" became the earliest published Indigenous autobiography in the United States. He reported he was born in 1798, the grandson of "a white man" who had married the granddaughter of Metacom, the Wampanoag leader known to the English as King Philip. "A Son of the Forest" detailed Apess' struggles with alcohol, and how he quit drinking and became ordained as a Methodist minister.

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Apess was a leader in the Massachusetts Indigenous peoples' battle to preserve their lands and to take greater control over their communities in an uprising known as the Mashpee Revolt of 1833-1834. The Mashpees (or Marshpees) "wanted their rights as men and as freemen," he wrote. Apess and the Mashpees invoked the language of the Nullification Crisis of 1832, when the state of South Carolina failed in an effort to declare federal tariffs

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unconstitutional. They tried to prevent white intruders from taking wood from Mashpee lands, which landed Apess briefly in prison. Many non-Natives feared the implications of Apess' stand, but their counsel, who was not Native, compared his clients to the patriots who had thrown tea into Boston Harbor in 1773.

[...]

For decades, scholars of early American history ignored Apess' books, though an edition of his complete writings in 1992 brought new attention to his critique of early New England. By then, other Indigenous writers and speakers also thought it necessary to challenge the romance of the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving.

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In 1970, an Aquinnah Wampanoag activist named Wamsutta Frank James delivered a speech in Plymouth that put the Indigenous experience at the center, not the periphery, of the history of the United States. Rather than celebrating a tradition of religious freedom and democracy, he spoke of centuries of prejudice and dispossession. His words had lasting impact: Each year on the fourth Thursday of November, Indigenous and supporters congregate on Cole's Hill in Plymouth to mark the holiday James suggested renaming the National Day of Mourning.

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There's a rich and still too-little-known tradition of Indigenous writings like Apess', including Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's early 17th century account of his travels and the many texts of Samson Occom, a Mohegan who raised funds later used (against his wishes) to establish Dartmouth College. Many of these authors offered penetrating critiques of the European conquest and colonization of the Americas. Like Apess, they bore witness and their words invite a similar reckoning.

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Looked at from the vantage points of 1637, 1676 and so many other moments in our country's history, that three-day meal in the autumn of 1621 was less a predictor of future goodwill among all Americans than a historic aberration. Thanksgiving may well survive for centuries. But as the rethinking of Columbus Day and the public's broader understanding of slavery and American history through educational programs like "The 1619 Project" have shown, it is not too late to make progress. Rather than see this holiday as an opportunity to gorge on a meal and dwell on naïve fantasies about a period of accord, it could become an opportunity to retell the history of the United States, putting Indigenous experiences at the center instead of the periphery.

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## The Supreme Court was enabling corruption well before the Clarence Thomas scandal

*The Los Angeles Times*, by Ciara Torres-Spelliscy

May 30, 2023

The Supreme Court recently reversed the conviction of a onetime aide and campaign manager for disgraced former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo. The decision may have surprised those who follow Albany's culture of corruption, but it was thoroughly in keeping with the recent history of the Supreme Court. The Roberts court has been busy deregulating corruption for over a decade. The court's own ethics have come under renewed scrutiny lately thanks to revelations about Justice Clarence Thomas, among others. What's less widely appreciated is the court's accumulating record of making political corruption easier to engage in and harder to prosecute.

The corruption conviction of Joseph Percoco did not exactly come out of left field. Cuomo had to resign from office in ignominy after he was credibly accused of a long pattern of sexual harassment, and he didn't enjoy a sterling reputation beforehand. In 2014, he made the not-suspicious-at-all decision to disband a commission that was investigating corruption in the state around the time it started getting too close to his friends. While eulogizing his father, the late Gov. Mario Cuomo, Andrew Cuomo referred to Percoco as a brother; the New York press referred to him as his enforcer. His official title in 2014 and 2015, around the time the Moreland Commission was looking into New York corruption, was executive deputy secretary to the governor. In 2018, a jury of Percoco's peers convicted him of accepting \$287,000 in bribes in exchange for helping an energy company get government business. Emails between Percoco and a consultant referred to the money as "ziti," aping a trope from "The Sopranos." U.S. District Court Judge Valerie Caproni said she hoped Percoco's six-year sentence would be "heard in Albany." Political corruption is a bipartisan, nationwide problem. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court under Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. has been legalizing corruption in cases involving both campaign finance and white-collar crime well beyond the Percoco case. This has been a big change. Under Roberts' predecessor as chief justice, William H. Rehnquist, the Supreme Court routinely upheld reasonable campaign finance rules as a means of preventing corruption. And the Rehnquist court had a broad definition of corruption that encompassed rich donors' power to "call the tune" for elected officials.

The Roberts court has taken a decidedly different tack in cases such as *McCutcheon vs. Federal Election Commission* (2014), which undid some campaign contribution limits for individuals. Suddenly, wealthy contributors' extraordinary access to elected officials was to be expected; it was no longer regarded as a facet of corrosive and potentially corrupt relationships between the donor class and elected officials. In *Davis vs. Federal Election Commission* (2007), in fact, Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. asserted that campaign finance laws discriminate against the rich. This upside-down way of looking at the world showed up in a string of cases culminating in *Citizens United*, which allows corporations to spend an unlimited amount of money on American elections. The Supreme Court no longer acknowledges that corporate political spending could possibly corrupt candidates. The Roberts court has also become the corrupt defendant's best friend in a series of cases involving white-collar crimes. In *Skilling vs. United States* (2010), for example, the court dramatically narrowed the definition of honest services fraud, a federal crime that has been crucial to prosecuting corruption. Jeffrey Skilling, the notorious crook who ran Enron, got 10 years knocked off his prison sentence as a result. In *McDonnell vs. United States* (2016), the court rescued former Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell from the hoosegow even though he took or borrowed money, clothes, a Rolex and a Ferrari, among other gifts, from a donor. And in *Kelly vs. United States*, the court spared the aides behind former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's Bridgegate scandal the prison term a jury thought they richly deserved. These opinions have ranged from narrow majorities to unanimity, but one of the most consistent votes for deregulating corruption has been Thomas. He not only thinks most anticorruption laws are unconstitutional; he has also maintained the view, extreme even for the Roberts court, that mere disclosure of the sources of money in politics somehow violates the 1st Amendment. The recent revelations that a wealthy Republican donor gave Thomas, his wife, his mother and his grandnephew a host of valuable gifts further illuminates the justice's zest for undisclosed relationships between the rich and those in power. And the entire court has effectively rebuffed any attempt at oversight, issuing a defiant response to Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin's recent request that Roberts answer questions about the court's ethics.

In the New York case, meanwhile, the justices relied on the fine distinction that most of Percoco's malfeasance occurred during a brief interregnum between stints in state government, while he was working on Cuomo's reelection campaign as a technically private citizen. The court wrote that "the intangible right of honest services ... plainly does not extend a duty to the public to all private persons." With the next presidential contest gearing up, the Percoco ruling could further embolden unscrupulous campaign managers and aides. After all, the front-runner for the Republican nomination has already seen two former top campaign officials, Paul Manafort and Steve Bannon, charged with federal crimes — and pardoned both of them. The Roberts court's continuing campaign to excuse corruption by other means is bad for our democracy.

## Mismanagement and ‘Monster Trains’ Have Wrecked American Rail

*The New York Times*, by Justin Rocznik

October 9, 2022

The United States averted a national freight rail strike a few weeks ago, when the Biden administration stepped in to broker a deal between rail companies and their union employees. Rail workers have not yet ratified that agreement, and a strike is still on the table. According to a railway trade group, a shutdown could cost the economy more than \$2 billion a day. Among the disasters that could ensue, power plants would lack the coal needed to produce electricity and water treatment plants would lack the chemicals needed to provide clean water. If the companies don't come to an agreement with rail workers, eventually, grocery shelves would go empty.

Rail workers' demands are not outrageous — union members have little to no predictability in their schedules and are subjected to draconian attendance policies. But the current standoff is about more, and is the result of a deliberate, half-century-long conversion of the nation's rail system from a network that could deliver many kinds of goods to market (while also hosting hundreds of passenger train lines), to a fleet of land barges that are good for coal and containers — not much else.

After World War II, railroad companies ceded freight, including mail and perishables, to semi trucks and instead favored goods like newsprint, chemicals and steel coils, which could sit in rail yards for days. Many freight companies made this change enthusiastically; trucking's rise gave them a strong reason to stop servicing goods that were financial and logistical pains to ship. So long to the rail cars full of livestock. Despite shifting to nonperishable goods, railroads did not stay profitable. By 1976, several railroad companies had gone bankrupt, threatening to collapse rail shipping along with them. Sensing disaster, Congress stepped in to create Conrail, a mostly government-owned company to keep service functional in the Northeast and Midwest. Its executives saw austerity as the way to profitability. Conrail cut costs everywhere it could, abandoning redundant tracks. It took a while, but it worked. The company was making strong profits by the '80s and was reprivatized in 1987. Conrail may have begun by trimming excesses, but soon railroads across the industry would take those lessons in cost cutting to an extreme.

In pursuit of efficiency, railroad companies across the entire industry adopted the theory of precision scheduled railroading (P.S.R.), developed by the railroad executive E. Hunter Harrison in the 1990s. Before P.S.R., freight shipping meant rail cars full of goods typically crossed the country on multiple trains, getting dropped off and picked up in yards and terminals in a time-consuming process. Harrison, seeing idle train cars and sitting inventory as waste, envisioned a system of shipping freight directly to its destination with consistent schedules for crew and customers. Goods, in theory, could arrive just in time for our lean supply chains.

When companies implemented P.S.R., they also adopted new technology that allowed for locomotive engines to be placed along the length of a train. Now, instead of engines pulling the train from the front, additional engines in the middle and the back help move even more train cars. Average train length grew around 25 percent from 2008 to 2017, and companies now regularly run trains that are three miles long.

Our infrastructure isn't built for these monster trains, which are now so long that many no longer fit the tracks designed to allow trains to pass one another. These trains are almost always overseen by a crew of just two people, who must walk for miles if a problem is found, in all kinds of weather. The trains are difficult to control, and if weight is unevenly distributed along them, they may break apart or even derail. Precision schedules imply that trains run on some semblance of a schedule. But monster trains and longer distances often lead to a series of small delays that can easily cascade into much longer ones. This means that when a rail crew's shift ends, its replacement is often called at odd hours to their station, usually with less than two hours' notice.

[...]  
Capping the length of our monster trains should be the first step that the United States takes toward reform, and it should take lessons from other countries as it pursues substantive change. Countries with huge levels of freight — including China, Russia and India — have nationalized railroads that reduce the financial incentives that clog up tracks with the longest trains possible. Switzerland has resisted trucking dominance through a herculean effort that combines upgrades to tracks and stations with centralized management. This benefits railway shippers and passengers, not just the private profit of shareholders.

Rail companies seem set on their self-destructive tendencies, often proposing one-person crews in labor negotiations that would further squeeze workers. Even with a successful negotiation, train yards and mainlines would still be full of long, slow, trudging trains on congested tracks with overworked crews. Through disinvestment, private rail management has shown for decades a disinterest in building a rail system that works for workers and shippers. If they can't figure out how to run a functioning railroad, maybe it's time to take it out of their hands.

## What the Writers' Strike Means for the Future of Hollywood

*The New York Times*, by Ross Douhat

May 20, 2023

Here's my attempt to summarize the context of the Hollywood writers' strike in three sentences. First, the entertainment business, floated on easy money and encouraged by the unusual conditions of the Covid era, committed itself to an unsustainable expansion — the great streaming experiment, in which every major brand would have a Netflix of its own. Then, as the unsustainability of this growth became apparent, the studios and streamers began  
5 wringing more and more out of their writers, at longer and less-predictable hours and with fewer long-term rewards, even as the corporate suits looked hopefully to A.I. to render certain writerly duties obsolete. This context makes the writers' demands appear reasonable and just, but it also means that the striking scribes could lose while winning — wringing concessions around pay and working hours as a prelude to a larger contraction, a collapse in the number of scripted shows that Hollywood puts out.

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The question for those of us who watch and write about TV shows and movies, rather than creating them, is what this conflict means for the art that justifies all of this commercial wrangling. One narrative sees an opportunity in the strike to reconsider the larger way that Hollywood has evolved, especially the Marvel-era fixation on franchises, reboots and "presold" storytelling, which is variously attributed to a profit-mad venture-capital mind-set taking hold in Hollywood  
15 or the effects of consolidation in the film business. Against this backdrop, the monopoly critic Matt Stoller argues that the goal of the strikers should be finding allies in the cause of big, structural change — breaking up the vertically integrated corporate behemoths, separating production and distribution once again and thereby making the alchemy of the midbudget movie more competitive with the superhero sweatshop.

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A somewhat more pessimistic analysis, offered by writers like Sonny Bunch and Jessa Crispin, emphasizes that the superhero-sweatshop corporate strategy evolved because it's giving audiences what they want. The people are buying tickets for comic book movies and "Super Mario," Bunch points out, not "Air" or "The Last Duel." The fan culture that sustains these projects, Crispin argues, often seems to prefer its writers to be replaceable cogs in a content machine. And so even if the strike is an opportunity for reconsiderations, it's probably not a lever that can change the  
25 system as a whole.

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Personally I would *like* to see the strike lever a different Hollywood system into being. But I would *settle* for a return to the [era] that existed around 10 years ago, before the streaming takeoff — when the downsides of the special-effects franchise era in cinema were partly compensated for by the emergence of richer, deeper, more ambitious television.

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My viewer's impression of what's happened since then is that the streaming expansion first delivered a welcome surfeit of small-screen ambition but then increasingly felt as if it was spreading creative talent too thin, working it too hard or both. Sometimes the shows of the peak-TV era start out brilliantly but then struggle to sustain their dynamism even in a second season. (HBO's "Westworld," for instance, or lately Showtime's "Yellowjackets.") Sometimes they play like thin imitations of the previous decade's antihero dramas. (Netflix's "Ozark," say.) Or they take on the  
35 character of the theatrical experience but somewhat worse — with too-big-to-fail franchises that nobody really enjoys. ("Obi-Wan Kenobi," say, or "Rings of Power.") Or they ask too much of a talented showrunner, who's paid more and more to deliver a spread of content rather than concentrating on a single story. (The evolution of Taylor Sheridan's "Yellowstone" and its disappointing spinoffs fills this bill.)

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In theory, the strike-and-aftermath scenario I sketched above — where the writers win better working conditions and higher pay but then the overall number of shows contracts as streaming platforms fold or merge — could bring some kind of resolution to this spread-too-thin problem. It could yield a world where writers' room talent is better compensated and more concentrated, where showrunners don't have as many empire-building opportunities but the shows they make are better for it. Obviously this isn't the outcome the union is hoping for, because it would mean  
45 fewer writing jobs. But for the viewer, a world with somewhat fewer shows might also be a world with better ones.

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The darker scenario, though, is that any streaming contraction could combine with an intensified television imitation of the big-screen franchise model. In that case, we could get more and more blockbuster television as a safe-seeming but uncreative bet while losing some of peak TV's serendipitous experiments — like the happy accident of "The  
50 White Lotus," whose resort drama came into being as a way to film in isolation during Covid, or the brilliance of "Andor," a "Star Wars" show without a brand name or a Baby Yoda. If you care about originality, that's the real lose-while-winning scenario for this strike: Writers end up with a fairer share of an industry pivoting further from creativity.

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## America's 'Neoliberal' Consensus Might Finally Be Dead

*The New York Times*, by David Wallace-Wells

May 25, 2023

When the Inflation Reduction Act was signed into law last August, it fired the starting gun on a new, green industrial arms race. But it also seemed to signal the end of something: America's uniform rhetorical commitment to the global reign of free markets.

5 There were hundreds of billions of dollars (at least) in green-energy spending embedded in the I.R.A., but the new  
spigot of directed federal subsidies also came with a throwback set of "Buy American" trade restrictions. If your E.V.  
battery wasn't 50 percent manufactured or assembled in the United States, or 40 percent produced by minerals mined  
or processed in the country or by its free-trade allies, you couldn't claim the tax credits that made it affordable. If  
10 you're building a solar farm with modules containing less than the required domestic content, you aren't going to be  
getting the full subsidy either.

The policy wonks called this a "new industrial policy," acknowledging that it was inspired by the success of China's  
state-directed capitalism and the necessity of competing with it. Indeed, you could see all these stipulations as a kind  
of declaration of a new trade war, over the industrial base of the future, in which our rival superpower was starting  
15 with an astonishing lead. By last count, China controlled almost three-quarters of the global production of almost  
every aspect of solar-panel or electric-vehicle battery manufacturing. For some inputs, the figure was 90 percent or 95  
percent.

Twenty years ago, or even 10, this division of labor would have seemed like the natural order of things: American  
20 money turning to Chinese manufacturing to engineer our dreams of high-tech prosperity. You could refer to the whole  
intuitive system in shorthand by just saying the word "Apple." But more recently, the iPhone's tangled supply chains  
started looking to American policymakers less like a miracle of globalization than like what might pass in Washington  
for a *casus belli*. And the threat of such a war has helped draw a curtain on a whole ideological era, one that has  
persisted for decades under the tattered and contested banner of "neoliberalism."

25 In April, in a speech at the Brookings Institution, Jake Sullivan, the national security adviser, somewhat formally  
declared the death of that old "Washington Consensus." For a generation, American leaders of both parties had spoken  
of the country's global economic interests in terms that were as high-minded and even messianic as they were  
simplistic and prescriptive: What was good for markets was good for America and what was good for America was  
30 good for the world. This was always something of an alibi for the country and its self-congratulatory ruling class, as  
anyone looking under the hood could have told you — a way of dressing up economic policy powered by financial  
interests as something approaching charity, or at least noblesse oblige (and, perhaps by design, overlooking the very  
real costs to American workers and the climate as well).

35 But it is striking, even so, just how naked the emerging "new consensus" looks, with those costumes discarded and the  
masks off. In January, at Davos, before the assembled and entrenched global business caste, the U.S. trade  
representative, Katherine Tai, called it bluntly "a new economic world order." In April, just after the International  
Monetary Fund and World Bank spring meetings, Janet Yellen declared that America could tolerate continued  
Chinese growth — but perhaps only as long as the United States remained the world's predominant superpower, she  
40 implied. Sullivan, too, has tried to speak softly — suggesting that the United States wanted to disengage from China in  
only a few key areas of strategic significance (computer chips, green tech, A.I.) and that the new policy of economic  
rivalry was conflict over a "small yard" protected by a "high fence." But he also has bluntly stated that his job is to  
serve not Goldman Sachs and its partners in China but the workers of America. This month, a longtime Biden aide,  
Jennifer Harris, approvingly tweeted a photo of a graduate student's tattoo: "Death to neoliberalism," it read.

45 What follows is not entirely clear. The "new consensus" has meant enormous state investment, directed toward  
industrial revival all around the postindustrial world. But it's not yet obvious that such a revival is truly workable —  
"Can the World Make an Electric-Car Battery Without China?" a headline in *The Times* recently wondered — which  
is one reason many regard that new economic world order as an expression of geopolitical rivalry more than industrial  
policy pursued for its own sake. [...] And short of outright great-power war, "geoeconomic fragmentation" may well  
50 look to most observers more like zombie neoliberalism, only modified and recalibrated in certain ways. But it is  
nevertheless remarkable, after decades of criticism from the global left and growing dissatisfaction since the Great  
Recession, how much of what we think we know about the nature of global trade emerges from neoliberalism itself —  
and how uncertain a post-neoliberal future looks, even to those eager for change, once you withdraw the operational  
55 framework provided by the end of history.

## Barbados plans to make Tory MP pay reparations for family's slave past

Paul Lashmar and Jonathan Smith, *The Observer*, Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2022

Richard Drax reported to have visited Caribbean island for meeting on next steps, including plans for former sugar plantation. The government of Barbados is considering plans to make a wealthy Conservative MP the first individual to pay reparations for his ancestor's pivotal role in slavery. *The Observer* understands that Richard Drax, MP for South Dorset, recently travelled to the Caribbean island for a private meeting with the country's prime minister, Mia Mottley. A report is now before Mottley's cabinet laying out the next steps, which include legal action in the event that no agreement is reached with Drax. Barbados became a republic a year ago after it removed Queen Elizabeth II as head of state.

The Drax family pioneered the plantation system in the 17th century and played a major role in the development of sugar and slavery across the Caribbean and the US. Barbados MP Trevor Prescod, chairman of Barbados National Task Force on Reparations, part of the Caricom Reparations Commission, said the UN had declared slavery to be a crime against humanity: "If the issue cannot be resolved we would take legal action in the international courts. The case against the Drax family would be for hundreds of years of slavery, so it's likely any damages would go well beyond the value of the land."

Countries in the Caribbean community (Caricom) have been campaigning for the payment of reparations by former colonial powers and institutions which profited from slavery. This is the first time a family has been singled out. Among the plans being considered are that 17th-century Drax Hall is turned into an Afro-centric museum and that a large portion of the plantation is used for social housing for low-income Bajan families. There is also a recommendation that Richard Drax pays for some of the work. David Comissiong, the Barbados ambassador to Caricom and deputy chairman of the task force, said that besides Drax, other families whose ancestors benefited from slavery are being considered including the British royal family: "It is now a matter that is before the government of Barbados. It is being dealt with at the highest level."

"Drax is fabulously wealthy today. The Drax family is the central family in the whole story of enslavement in Barbados. They are the architects of slavery-based sugar production. They have a deep historical responsibility. The process has only just begun and we trust that we will be able to negotiate. If that doesn't work, there are other methods, including litigation. "Other families are involved, though not as prominently as the Draxes. This reparations journey has begun. The matter is now for the cabinet of Barbados. It is in motion. It is being dealt with." Drax came under the spotlight in December 2020, after the *Observer* revealed he had not declared his inheritance of the 250-hectare (617 acres) Drax Hall plantation. He did so only after official documents surfaced which named him as the owner. He had inherited the plantation, valued at Bds\$12.5m (£5.25m), from his father, Walter, in 2017.

Drax, 64, lives at the family's mansion in Charborough Park, Dorset. He and his family are worth at least £150m and own 23.5 square miles in Dorset, and an estate and grouse moor in Yorkshire. The family also own 125 Dorset properties personally or through family trusts and a £4.5m holiday villa on nearby Sandbanks. Drax's ancestor, Sir James Drax, was one of the first Englishmen to colonise Barbados in the early 17th century. He part-owned at least two slave ships, the *Samuel* and the *Hope*.

The Drax family also owned a plantation in Jamaica, which they sold in the 19th century. When slavery was abolished across the British empire in 1833, the family received £4,293 12s 6d, a very large sum in 1836, in compensation for freeing 189 enslaved people.

Prescod added: "The Drax family had slave ships. They had agents in the African continent and kidnapped black African people to work on their plantations here in Barbados. I have no doubt that what would have motivated them was that they never perceived us to be equal to them, that we were human beings. They considered us as chattels."

## Anti-car Sadiq Khan is destroying London

***If he is allowed to get away with his war on drivers, mayors across the country will soon follow his lead***

Gareth Bacon, *The Telegraph*, 27<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Sadiq Khan's latest plan to make it harder to drive should worry us all. It's the worst assault on motorists we've ever seen. The London Mayor is determined to price working people off the roads and has ignored their overwhelming objections, giving them no choice, time or opportunity to avoid a ruinous bill. If Mr Khan gets away with this, any other city or regional  
5 mayor can impose reckless driving charges across the country. It must be stopped. First, it is worth explaining why the expansion of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (Ulez) would be so disastrous. The current, daily, £12.50 (≈ 14€) Ulez charge will no longer be contained to central London, where there are the best public transport options and car ownership is low. From August 2023, he will charge the capital's outer boroughs too, with their car-  
10 reliant suburbs and rural villages, hitting more than 200,000 older, non-compliant cars and vans daily. The mayor's activist supporters may justify this assault by claiming it is a tax on the wealthy – but it is those on the lowest incomes who will be hit the hardest. Indeed, Transport for London's (TfL) own analysis shows that more than 50 per cent of outer London households earning as little as £10,000 (≈ 11 280€) a year own a car, with car  
15 ownership rocketing to 70 per cent of households earning above £20,000.

Does the mayor know what his tax raid would do to such people, who rely on their cars not just to work and pay their bills, but also to shop or visit family and friends? He should leave the comfort of City Hall and come to the doorsteps of my constituency, Orpington, on the very edge of Greater London, where thousands (83 per cent of  
20 households own a car) could be hit with an eye-watering annual driving bill of up to £4,500 (≈ 5 075€). Mr Khan should be reminded that, unlike residents in Islington or Camden, my constituents don't have access to the Tube or trams. They can't be zoomed across the capital on the shiny new Elizabeth Line. They do have Southeastern trains into central London, but in recent months these have often been disrupted by  
25 strikes, leaving people stranded.

Moreover, not everyone is a commuter; many work in and around our community, and some work in Kent and other areas outside Greater London. This is not unique – it is similar across many outer London boroughs, where even those with a Tube station often rely on their cars to access the public transport network.

30 But it seems Mr Khan is imposing his extra tax precisely because of – not in spite of – our reliance on cars. He claims to want to improve air quality, but it is really about raising money to save his failing administration. According to Transport for London's impact assessment, the air quality benefit from expanding Ulez would be little to negligible. But with hundreds of thousands of people being hit by the new charge every day – or indeed  
35 the new increased fine of £180 (≈ 203€) for failing to pay the charge – the mayor's cash grab will raise millions. There is real danger in this for the rest of the country. If Mr Khan gets away with it, he will have set a precedent for other cash-strapped city and regional mayors eager to make up their budget deficits. They will view it as an easy cash injection as opposed to the more tenuous task of spending taxpayers' money responsibly. They will  
40 drool over their London counterpart's ability to stage a highway robbery that no one voted for and that a consultation rejected. Any councillor in the country knows a local authority cannot legally impose car-parking charges, fines or traffic-enforcement measures purely to raise money. But Mr Khan is exposing a loophole: all you need to do is tie the driving charge to poorly reasoned air-quality concerns, give people just nine months' notice, hike the fine  
45 for non-payment, and target areas where you will catch the most people. It is immoral and unfair, especially during an energy crisis and rising inflation but, shamefully, his war on cars might well succeed unless an urgent campaign is mounted. It is time ministers looked seriously at the accountability of directly-elected mayors. Devolution has some benefits,

but localism doesn't work when the administrative system suffocates local democracy.

- 50
- *Gareth Bacon is the Conservative MP for Orpington, a town about 20km south-east of London*

## Britain's obesity epidemic is crushing the NHS

J Meirion Thomas, *The Telegraph*, 30<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Let's stop the political correctness and the pretence. In the vast majority of cases, obesity is due to a lifestyle choice and thus avoidable. The defining formula is simple: calories consumed versus calories spent. When the former exceeds the latter, the excess energy is stored as fat. If the process continues, the slippery slope to obesity beckons and, with it, the risk of chronic ill health and premature death.

It has recently been estimated that the annual cost of obesity to the Treasury is £58 billion, mainly comprising expenses to the National Health Service. The costs to the individual are equally stark, namely a myriad of obesity-induced illnesses, a reduced quality of life, and earlier death. But there is a misplaced nervousness about doing anything about it. I applaud other forms of intervention such as the "sugar tax" and the plan to introduce a 9pm watershed for advertising of junk food. I also understand the importance of poverty and mental health as factors relevant to obesity. In 2019, 35 per cent of people living in the most deprived areas were obese compared with 22 per cent of people in the least deprived areas.

Nevertheless, obesity is usually self-inflicted and it harms other people. Its additional costs are shared among all taxpayers. It is essentially no different to tobacco smoking, recreational drug use and drink driving or speeding.

Obesity is best assessed by calculating Body Mass Index (BMI). People who are overweight have a BMI of 25- 29.9kg/m<sup>2</sup>; those who are moderately obese have a BMI of 30 -39.9; and the severely obese, have a BMI of 40 and above. In the UK, the incidence of obesity has doubled over the past 30 years. About half of British adults are overweight and about 15 million people have a BMI of 30 or greater. This trend is increasing.

Childhood obesity is a particular problem. In a 2020-2021 survey, 26 per cent of children in Year Six were either obese or severely obese. Prevention, especially in childhood, is vitally important. Indeed, studies have shown that moderate obesity in adults reduces life expectancy by three years. With a BMI of 40-50, life expectancy is reduced by 10 years and with a BMI of over 50, it is reduced by 15 years.

In addition, quality of life before death will be impaired. That is in large part because obesity is associated with an increased incidence of all kinds of illnesses, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, some cancers and degenerative joint disease. Obesity in pregnancy poses risks to the mother and baby. It is also linked to infertility.

Type 2 diabetes in obese patients is an insidious process that imperceptibly damages healthy tissues. Its incidence is rising rapidly, even in people under 40. The problem can be solved, temporarily, by taking tablets, seemingly a trivial solution, but the onset of diabetes may be the final warning. If the core weight problem is not addressed, the underlying tissue damage continues.

About half of all deaths due to obesity, meanwhile, are caused by cardiovascular disease, meaning heart attacks or strokes. These deaths happen prematurely compared with people of healthy weight. Obesity is also the second most frequent cause of cancer in the UK. About 22,800 new cancers every year are due to patients being overweight or obese. Degenerative joint disease, especially of the knees, is common in obesity and caused by the continuous trauma of carrying excessive weight. Sadly, obese patients were also more susceptible to Covid and a higher proportion died. All this explains the pressures and costs of obesity to the NHS. In 2019-2020, there were about 20,000 hospital admissions directly attributable to obesity. There were also more than one million admissions where obesity was recorded as a secondary diagnosis, an increase of 17 per cent on 2018/2019. I was privileged to work as a cancer surgeon in the NHS for 33 years. Especially with abdominal operations in obese patients, one knew that the operation would be more difficult, would take longer and, as confirmed by many studies, the complication rate and hospital stay would be greater. Obesity is the greatest risk to

50 the NHS in terms of cost and the overwhelming demand on resources. This article is written in the hope that a proportion of obese people will heed the warnings and lose weight. Possibly, a few lives might be saved. The evidence is indisputable. But is there an element of self-deception and denial when the diagnosis and solutions to obesity are mentioned?

- *J Meirion Thomas is a consultant surgeon*

## Less than half of population are Christian, census reveals

Kaya Burgess and James Beal, *The Times*, Tuesday November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022

The proportion of people who identify as Christian in England and Wales has fallen below half for the first time, census data shows. Meanwhile, the number of people with “no religion” has almost trebled since the turn of the millennium.

5 England and Wales have become much less religious over the course of this century. The 2021 census shows that 37.5 per cent of the population, or about 22.3 million people, said that they do not belong to any religion. This is up from 15 per cent, or about 7.8 million people, in 2001 and 25 per cent, about 14 million people, in 2011.

10 The census figures also showed that the share of the white British ethnic group in England and Wales has fallen by 13 percentage points since 2001, from 87.5 per cent to 74.4 per cent in 2021. That represents a drop of 1.1 million people.

The ethnic minority share in London has grown considerably, while Manchester and Birmingham have become minority white British for the first time. The proportion of white British residents in London in 2021 was 37 per cent, dropping from 45 per cent in 2011.

15 The figures on religion represent a landmark moment in two historically Christian countries. The percentage of people identifying as Christians stood at 71.7 per cent, or 37.3 million people, in 2001. This fell to 59.3 per cent, or 33.3 million people, by the 2011 census. The figure now stands at just 46.2 per cent, or 27.5 million people, a drop bigger than expected by many experts who had thought it would stay above 50 per cent.

20 A total of 10.8 per cent of people in England and Wales belong to non-Christian religions, an increase from 8.4 per cent in 2011, with the proportion of Muslims having increased from 4.8 per cent to 6.5 per cent of the population, an increase from 2.7 million to 3.9 million people, or slightly larger than the total population of Wales. Christians still outnumber Muslims by more than seven to one and outnumber all other religions put together by more than four to one. Those with no religion outnumber adherents of non-Christian faiths by more than three to one.

25 The Most Rev Stephen Cottrell, the Archbishop of York, said the church had existed for 2,000 years to “share the good news of Jesus Christ, serve our neighbour and bring hope to a troubled world” and added: “It’s what we must do now more than ever.”

30 A spokesman for Humanists UK said: “These results confirm that the biggest demographic change in England and Wales of the last ten years has been the dramatic growth of the non-religious. They mean the UK is almost certainly one of the least religious countries on Earth. No state in Europe has such a religious set-up as we do in terms of law and public policy, while at the same time having such a non-religious population ... This census result should be a wake-up call which prompts fresh reconsiderations of the role of religion in society.” The latest census data confirms that England and Wales would be 12th on the list of the least religious countries in the world, behind only the Czechs, Estonians, Latvians and Dutch in Europe in our lack of religious faith, according to a league table compiled by the Pew Research Center in the US. The National Secular Society, which campaigns for religion to have a less prominent role in public life, today put this trend down to a “a population continuing to shift away from Christianity and from religion as a whole”.

40 Dr Rhiannon McAleer, head of research at the Bible Society, said: “The census definitely does not show that we are living in a society that has turned its back on religion. However, it does appear to show that religious identity is changing. This reflects other data and is not a surprise.” The Church of England has faced a challenging decade since the last census. There has been the uncovering of serious sex abuse scandals, bitter divisions over the appointment of women bishops and gay rights and a perceived disconnect between Remain-backing bishops and Brexit-voting worshippers. There has also been discomfort over racism within the church, both among those who feel the church has not done enough to welcome non-white worshippers and clergy and those who feel the church has gone too far in apologising for its past and seeking to remove or alter memorials to slave traders. Its Sunday congregations shrank from 801,000 to 690,000 between 2011 and 2019. Driven in large part by migration both from Christian and non-Christian countries, London is more religious than the nation as a whole, with 66 per cent belonging to a religion compared with 56.9 per cent nationwide. It also has more religious diversity.

## Elgin Marbles perfect replica unveiled with British Museum in talks

David Sanderson, Arts correspondent, *The Times*, Monday, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022

Accurate to a fraction of a millimeter, the sculpture was built from the original Greek marble

A new Parthenon sculpture carved from the same Greek marble used on the originals 2,500 years ago will be unveiled in London on Tuesday as discussions about placing it in the British Museum begin.

The sculpture of a horse's head, carved by robots from marble provided by Greece, is a replica of one of the dozens of sculptures held by the British Museum since Lord Elgin took them from the Parthenon in Athens in the early 19th century.

The Oxford-based Institute for Digital Archaeology created the replica after surreptitiously scanning the originals in the British Museum — to the later anger of the institution — using Lidar cameras to produce measurements accurate to a fraction of a millimetre.

A robot with diamond rotary cutters took about five days to carve the replica from a one-tonne chunk of marble the institute secured from the same quarry on Mount Pentelicus that Phidias used in the 5th century BC. Another replica of a Parthenon metope (carved plaque), depicting a fight between a man and centaur, is being worked on after being scanned.

Roger Michel, the founder of the institute, said he had recently spoken to George Osborne, the British Museum chairman, about displaying the replicas, adding that the former Conservative chancellor had not ruled it out. Pressure is growing on the British Museum over its ownership of looted objects including the marbles. Many believe Elgin stole the marbles from Greece, which was under Ottoman occupation.

The British Museum and government have consistently ruled out permanently returning the sculptures, although Osborne did say recently that he thought there was "a deal to be done where we can tell both stories in Athens and in London".

Michel said this week: "It is a moral case and there is no question they are going to have to give back the Benin Bronzes, the Cambodian sculptures. When you steal stuff and put it on public display, don't be surprised if sooner or later someone comes along and says: 'You stole that from me and I want it back'." "There is a low tolerance now for cultural appropriation and the British Museum is behind the times. And besides, these things were like amazing grapes for the British; they have squeezed all the wine and got as much Greek culture infused in British culture as it can hold." Michel, who conducted the scanning with Alexy Karenowska, the institute's director of technology, said that two other replicas of the sculptures which have been carved by a robot from a different piece of marble would be painted with the vivid colours, such as brown skin tones, that Phidias used for the originals. He said that the British Museum's "pure white" marbles were misleading. Painted replicas and virtual reality can "really show how antiquity looked", he said. "It could end up with a collection of really exciting objects to tell the kind of story they are claiming to tell already but aren't," Michel added. Michel said that the display of the replica at the Freud Museum would be accompanied by an augmented reality display of the original horse's head at the British Museum.

### History set in stone

The sculptures and reliefs designed by Phidias from 447 BC to 432 BC are not that impressive, according to the Institute for Digital Archaeology. They were intended to sit high up and were never meant to be seen at eye-height, meaning the better designs were reserved for elsewhere. Greece and Britain have certainly never managed to see eye to eye on them. It was in the early 1800s that Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin, using a piece of paper from the Ottoman administration allowing him "some pieces of stone", brought to Britain dozens of the treasures from the badly damaged Parthenon. There were 17 life-size figures from the temple's pediments, portions of sculpted friezes, more than a dozen metopes and other sculptural decorations. In 1816 Elgin sold the sculptures for £35,000 to the government, which placed them in the British Museum where they have remained for more than two centuries.



## **Pickleball raises our social capital. That's what America needs.**

*The Washington Post*, by Katrina vanden Heuvel

August 30, 2022

In a Pittsburgh suburb this June, a sizable crowd gathered to watch four individuals duking it out in a fiery doubles match. The MVP of the showdown? Sixty-four-year-old attorney Meg Burkardt, who didn't realize that the three men she "whooped" that day were used to a different sport: They were Pittsburgh Steelers T.J. Watt, Alex Highsmith and Minkah Fitzpatrick. What brought this unlikely combination of athletes to North Park on a lazy Saturday evening?

5 The fast-growing phenomenon of pickleball.

A "sneaky-fast amalgam of tennis, badminton, and Ping-Pong," pickleball was created in 1965, but its popularity has skyrocketed over the past couple of years, perhaps in part because of the coronavirus pandemic's spiking demand for socially distanced outdoor activities. The game is enthralling everyone from youngsters to seniors, everywhere from

10 Texas community centers to California country clubs. It's now the fastest-growing sport in the United States, with almost 5 million "picklers" and counting — a population that has nearly doubled since 2014. It's easy to dismiss pickleball as a silly fad; it is, after all, called pickleball. But with so many people of different backgrounds coming together to play it, at a time when such camaraderie feels increasingly rare, there might be lessons to be gleaned from the sport's sudden ubiquity.

15 New Yorker magazine writer Sarah Larson understands this, posing a question I never thought I'd ask: "Can pickleball save America?" While that headline might be tongue-in-cheek — much as I wish it could, pickleball alone won't rescue our crumbling democracy — any phenomenon that can foster community on this scale is worth checking out. After all, getting Americans out of the house, moving and talking to one another is harder than ever. In recent

20 decades, social isolation and polarization have been on the rise, while overall physical activity has declined. All these trends have been exacerbated by the pandemic. According to political scientist Robert Putnam, author of the seminal 2000 book "Bowling Alone," the United States has been struggling for some time with declining "social capital." A community's level of social capital is determined by the strength of the relationships forged within that social

25 network. When we fail to meaningfully connect with one another, we can't reap the benefits of trust, reciprocity and cooperation. And we're paying the price. Studies have found that societies with low social capital suffer higher rates of crime, lower quality of government and worse physical health than those with deeper connections. Sure enough: Americans today have fewer friends than ever. And when we participate in public discussions, it's often through social media platforms engineered to profit off our divisions. By many measures, we live in a lonely, cloistered, exceptionally detached nation.

30 Enter pickleball. (Bear with me.) The captivating charm of the sport is its ability to connect strangers from all walks of life. It's easy to play, affordable, casual and relatively free of age or fitness limitations. It's the thread uniting a group of 13 women in West Hartford, Conn., who call themselves the "Bad-Ass Babes" at their nearly daily games; it's the wedding theme for couples who fell in love on the courts. And even if your pickleball partner doesn't become your

35 life partner, you might walk away from a match with a new friend.

Such relationships uplift everyone involved. New research by Harvard economist Raj Chetty picks up on the conversation about social capital, finding that at the community level, cross-class connections and friendships are the greatest booster of economic mobility. In other words, society benefits when we "play ball" (literally or figuratively)

40 with people from different backgrounds — and develop meaningful relationships with them. But achieving this vision isn't without its challenges; even pickleball isn't immune to NIMBY politics. Homeowners associations and tennis loyalists alike have taken legal action against pickleballers, complaining that the games are noisy and infringe upon the sanctity of tennis courts. These sorts of conflicts might seem small-ball, but they speak to a broader truth: For public social activities such as pickleball to thrive, they need real support.

45 Cities from Redondo Beach, Calif., to Lincoln, Neb., are investing in public pickleball courts —and it's vital that local governments take this sort of initiative. After all, pickleball is a "low profit per square foot" activity (as are many of life's greatest joys), which makes it unlikely that private developers will take the lead in creating space for it. But community initiatives that center connectedness and well-being at the local level bring returns of a different kind.

50 Publicly financing community spaces — from pickleball courts to public parks, from adult learning centers to community gardens — can go a long way toward getting people to engage with one another.

We've spent a great deal of our energy and resources treating the symptoms of a polarized, disconnected, burnt-out nation. But meaningful solutions can start with real connection on a local scale — whether it's a conversation with

55 your neighbor or a pickup game of pickleball. Pickleball might not save America, but it's certainly worth taking a swing at.

## U.S. Christian majority could fade in coming decades, models find

*The Washington Post*, by Bob Smietana

September 13, 2022

The United States has long prided itself on people's freedom to choose whatever religion they like. The majority has long chosen Christianity. By 2070, that may no longer be the case, according to the Pew Research Center. If current trends continue, Christians could make up less than half of the population — and as little as a third — in 50 years. Meanwhile, the religiously unaffiliated — or “nones” — could make up close to half the population. And the percentage of Americans who identify as Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and adherents of other non-Christian faiths could double.

Those are among the major findings of a new report from Pew regarding the United States' religious future, a future in which Christianity, though diminished, persists, while non-Christian faiths grow amid rising secularization.

Researchers projected possible religious futures for the United States using a number of factors, including birthrates, migration patterns, demographics including age and sex, and the current religious landscape. They also looked at how religion is passed from one generation to another and how often people switch religions — in particular Christians who become nones, a number that has been increasing in recent years. Researchers projected four different scenarios, based on differing rates of religious switching, from a continued increase to no switching at all. The unaffiliated were projected to grow under all four. Currently, about a third (31 percent) of Christians become disaffiliated before they turn 30, according to Pew Research. Twenty-one percent of nones become Christian as young adults. Should those switching rates remain stable, Christians would make up 46 percent of the population by 2070, while nones would comprise 41 percent.

If disaffiliation rates continue to grow but are capped at 50 percent of Christians leaving the faith, 39 percent of Americans are projected to be Christian by 2070, with 48 percent of Americans identifying as nones. With no limit placed on the percentage of people leaving Christianity and with continued growth in disaffiliation, Christians would be 35 percent of the population, with nones making up a majority of Americans (52 percent). If all switching came to a halt, Christians would remain a slight majority (54 percent), and nones would make up 34 percent of Americans, according to the model. Non-Christian faiths would rise to 12 to 13 percent of the population, largely because of migration, in each scenario. Migration does affect the percentage of Christians, as most migrants to the United States are Christians, said Conrad Hackett, associate director of research and senior demographer at Pew Research Center. “Still the greatest amount of change in the U.S., we think currently and in the future, will come from switching,” he said.

Researchers stressed that the report contained projections that are based on data and mathematical models, and are not predictions of the future. “Though some scenarios are more plausible than others, the future is uncertain, and it is possible for the religious composition of the United States in 2070 to fall outside the ranges projected,” they wrote.

One reason for the decline in the proportion of Christians and the growth among the nones in the models is age. While Christians have more children than nones, they also skew older. Pew estimates that the average Christian in the United States is 43, which is 10 years older than the average none. “The unaffiliated are having and raising unaffiliated children while Christians are more likely to be near the end of their lives than others,” Stephanie Kramer, a senior researcher at Pew, wrote in an email. [...] The current report takes advantage of the amount of data collected about the U.S. religious landscape. Researchers also looked at intergenerational transmission for the first time, Kramer said.

“The variables we use to study that were: What is the mother's religion? And what is the teen's religion?” she said. “If that was a match, we consider the mother's religion transmitted.” Researchers also looked at a relatively new trend of disaffiliation among older Americans. Sociologists have long focused on younger people, who are most likely to switch religions. But in the United States and other countries, older people are starting to switch at growing rates themselves. “It's not as large-scale, but it's still significant,” Hackett said. “And it's contributing to the religious change that we have experienced and that we expect to experience in the years ahead.” Hackett said that the projections for the country do not show the end of Christianity or of religion in general, which he expects to remain robust. And most nones, while claiming no religion, do not identify as atheists. Instead, Kramer said, the United States appears to be going through a pattern of secularization that has happened in other countries, though “we may be a bit behind.”

Other factors outside the model — such as changing immigration patterns and religious innovation — could lead to a revival of Christianity in the United States, according to the report. But none of its models shows a reversal of the decline of Christian affiliation, which dropped from 78 percent in 2007 to 63 percent in 2020, according to Pew research. In the report, researchers note that “there is no data on which to model a sudden or gradual revival of Christianity (or of religion in general) in the U.S.” “That does not mean a religious revival is impossible,” they wrote. “It means there is no demographic basis on which to project one.”

## There's a remedy for Britain's problems: rejoin the E.U, by Fareed Zakaria

*The Washington Post*, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

This week marked the third anniversary of Brexit, and it coincided with a grim verdict from the International Monetary Fund: This year, the British economy will do worse than all of the world's major economies — including Russia. The 2016 vote to leave the European Union marked the symbolic start of the wave of populism that has been coursing through much of the Western world ever since. It was a conscious choice by a major country to have poorer economic relations with its largest market. (In 2021, the European Union took in around 42 percent of British exports.) British voters thus put nationalism and politics above economics.

On virtually every measure, from business investment to exports to employment, Britain is falling behind its peers. Think tank scholar John Springford put it simply: "If you impose barriers to trade, investment and migration with your biggest trading partner (EU), then you're going to have quite a big hit to trade volumes, and to investment and to GDP." Everywhere you look, Britain is feeling the pinch, from a shortage of workers to small companies struggling to send their goods into Europe to reduced traffic on the Eurostar train between Britain and Europe. Bloomberg Economics estimates that British GDP would be 4 percent higher had it stayed in the European Union. Britons know they were conned. According to one survey, a clear majority now believe that leaving the European Union was a bad idea, and almost two-thirds want a future referendum on rejoining. The current prime minister, Rishi Sunak, was a Brexiteer himself and continues to mouth platitudes about its virtues — while he faces a series of crises that has in part been generated by Brexit. Even now, Britain has not resolved how it will handle the border between itself and European Union member Ireland — which could further derail economic growth.

Brexit was part of a broader collapse of British confidence. After the global financial crisis of 2008, British productivity turned downward sharply and has never recovered. Austerity policies made things worse as Tory governments slashed public spending, widening inequality and heightening general anxiety. As always, when times get tough, it is easy to blame foreigners, and opportunistic politicians such as Boris Johnson did just that, promising that Brexit would cure all the evils that faced the country and lying about the costs and benefits. Johnson's fantasies of a lean and productive "Global Britain" that, once unshackled by Brexit, would become a kind of Singapore-on-Thames have gone nowhere. In fact, Britain now spends more on its welfare state, faces strikes across many crucial sectors and is experiencing deepening wage stagnation. According to Financial Times reporter John Burn-Murdoch, if things continue this way, the average British family will be poorer than the average Slovenian family by the end of next year.

The effects go beyond economics. Over the years, I have listened to every prime minister from Margaret Thatcher through David Cameron. They varied in political philosophy but all had an ambitious conception of Britain's role in the world. Though they acknowledged that Britain would never be a superpower like the United States or China, they envisioned it as an energetic, engaged global player that cared deeply about the world. Britain had a powerful voice in the European Union as one of its three biggest economies; it also enjoyed special status thanks to its U.N. veto, its close relations with Washington, and its impressive armed forces. Most important, it had a long tradition of generating ideas and agendas on global issues — rooted in its legacy as a liberal, free-trading country with deep historical ties around the world. It had a voice that was heard everywhere and listened to seriously. But over the past decade, defense spending has stagnated while funds for the foreign service, foreign aid and even the BBC have been cut in real terms. With Brexit, even the rhetoric about a larger role collapsed, as politicians ran away from anything that seemed too global. Now British prime ministers rarely speak to the international media — and when they do, they have nothing to say. Britain has become a middling island nation isolated off the coast of Europe, without the heft to matter on its own or to set the agenda in its partnerships. Even Washington has little time for a country that is not even part of the E.U. As journalist Neal Ascherson once feared, Great Britain has become Little England.

There is a remedy that would restore British growth, enlarge the country's ambitions and return it to a central place in shaping a new world of great power competition. It would, of course, require that Britain return to the European Union.

## What the Memorial Day weekend debt ceiling deal teaches us about politics

*The Washington Post*, by E.J. Dionne Jr.

May 28, 2023

This Memorial Day weekend, there is a strange disconnect in our country's public life. In Washington, negotiators scrambling to avoid a market calamity reached a debt ceiling deal that was more narrow than Republicans hoped and Democrats feared it would be. You might expect from this that our politics is primarily about taxes, spending and economics. But on the 2024 Republican campaign trail, former president Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis are skirmishing over who will be the dominant voice in opposition to "wokeness" and trans rights and who can keep the most books out of schools and libraries. Dollars and cents seem to be an afterthought. In one sense, this is GOP politics as usual. Going back to Richard M. Nixon's Southern strategy in 1968, the party has often played down its desire to cut popular government programs, preferring to emphasize (with perhaps more subtlety than Trump and DeSantis) cultural and racial issues that appeal to blue-collar White voters. The playbook is quite consistent: Harvest votes from less affluent social conservatives and pursue policies that benefit well-off economic conservatives.

This weekend is surprisingly instructive about how these two brands of politics overlap and reinforce each other. The divisions we see in the country now go back to Memorial Day's origins in the aftermath of the Civil War. At the time, the holiday — first held on May 5, 1868 — was called "Decoration Day" because it was an occasion to adorn the graves of fallen Union soldiers with flowers. It was initiated by the Grand Army of the Republic, the vast and politically influential organization of Union veterans at a time when North/South divisions were still raw and the two parties decidedly polarized. Republicans were for racial progress, pushing Reconstruction in the South to democratize the region and guarantee full political rights for Black Americans. Formerly enslaved people were winning elections and enacting more egalitarian policies. Democrats were the party of the Confederate South, reaction and outright racism.

As it happens, 1868 was also the year the 14th Amendment won ratification. It has received a lot of attention lately because of its section declaring that the validity of the U.S. debt "shall not be questioned." But its core purpose was to guarantee equal rights for all Americans and citizenship for formerly enslaved individuals. Historian Eric Foner rightly called the Civil War amendments the nation's "Second Founding." Why was that debt provision even in the 14th Amendment? As historian David K. Thomson recently wrote in *The Post*, honoring the debt accumulated during the Civil War was not just a money issue; it was also a moral and political issue, signaling support for "a central government that had not only survived, but also grown in scope." The "drastic expansion of U.S. debt," Thomson added, "reflected democratic buy-in from millions of Americans in the Union cause, and ultimately a shift in war aims to emancipation of the enslaved." The arguments around the budget and the debt ceiling in 2023 reflect a similar interaction of fiscal issues and questions of social and political equality (with the two parties largely switching sides).

One of the thorniest issues in the negotiations between President Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) involved so-called work requirements for the recipients of various public benefits. Because such requirements don't get anyone a job and mostly create bureaucratic obstacles for working people entitled to benefits, Biden sought and won sharply narrower provisions affecting fewer programs and individuals while increasing help for veterans and the homeless. The work requirements shouldn't have survived at all. The fact that McCarthy made them a bottom line speaks to the power of the signal they send about who is "worthy" of public help and who is not, with racial stereotypes lurking in the background. "It is not a coincidence that the reaction to the civil rights movement featured new attacks on the role of government," said my Brookings Institution colleague Vanessa Williamson, author of "Read My Lips: Why Americans Are Proud to Pay Taxes." "The counterpoint to the 'welfare queen,' a term made popular by Ronald Reagan, was always the poor, hard-working taxpayer — and we can all hear that dog whistle. You see exactly the same kind of anti-tax rhetoric from the white supremacists who violently overthrew Reconstruction." At the same time, said Johns Hopkins political scientist Lilliana Mason, author of "Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity," the rhetorical strategies of Trump and DeSantis move attention away from "broadly unpopular cuts" to "extremely popular programs." "The base is being told not to vote based on those policies," she said in an interview, and to "pay attention only to this culture war, grievance politics stuff that they're being thrown every day." Under these circumstances, it's easier to advance a general attack on government spending, thereby evading debate on the merits of particular government benefits and investments.

The good news about the debt ceiling deal is that the country will not default on its debt (avoiding a fight of this sort for the remainder of Biden's presidency) and will escape the extreme cuts right-wing Republicans originally hoped for. This is balanced by the reality that divided control of Congress will foil social advances through 2024. As we join in honoring our country's fallen heroes, we should ponder how far we are — as we were on the first Memorial Day — from the solidarity to which this worthy holiday calls us.

## The Spirit of 1776 or 1619?

Time, by Craig Bruce Smith

October 21, 2022

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” wrote Thomas Jefferson in the summer of 1776. But slavery still existed. And therein lies the inherent contradiction of the Declaration, Jefferson, and the latest revival of *1776* by directors Jeffrey L. Page and Diane Paulus and the Roundabout Theater Company. *1776* excels by grappling with such tension even amidst turmoil within the cast that similarly asks the question: whose Revolution is it?

Originally released in 1969, the musical tells the story of the Second Continental Congress meeting to discuss the possibility of declaring independence from Great Britain in the late spring and early summer of 1776. So “does anybody care” about *1776* in 2022? Americans need to care. Although many American may never see the show on Broadway, they will still be the voices that evaluate the Founders’ legacies and determine their place in today’s society.

[...]

For all of the scholarly writing on slavery and the American Revolution, *1776* has one of the most nuanced and well-reasoned arguments about the tensions between Revolutionary liberty and slavery. “What will posterity think we were—demigods?,” Franklin asks Adams, “We’re men—no more, no less—trying to get a nation started against greater odds than a more generous God would have allowed. John—first things first! Independence! America! For if we don’t secure that what difference will the rest make?” Regardless of the Declaration’s obvious limitations, it was the source of the expansion of rights for all Americans over the centuries.

The Adams-Franklin debate on slavery versus independence remains the heart of the show. While the original presents it as a moment of reluctant compromise that forged a nation that would eventually fulfill the promise of the Declaration, the ending of the 2022 version makes a sharp detour. No longer do the actors pose like John Trumbell’s 1818 painting that hangs in the Rotunda of the Capitol. Now, after the signing, the cast looks out at the audience, “Is anybody there? Does anybody care?” The set background opens to an obvious allusion to a “slave ship” (a cargo hull filled with casks of rum from an earlier number). The cast turns its back on the audience and sings the phrase again. In the limited room allowed by copyright, the directors offered themes more fitting with the *1619 Project*.

2022’s *1776* represents a hybrid of the spirits of 1776 and 1619. The directors want it to be a revolutionary show at the same time they want to play it “cool” and “considerate.” The directors naturally read the *1619 Project* and antiracist activist Ibram X. Kendi, and it shows. They also work in modern politics, an activist slogan, light conservatives in red (positively Republican), and even seemingly link the Founders to Confederates. In embracing the original text, it leans 1776, but in its conclusions are 1619. The central theme is so muddled that the directors’ choices have even drawn dissent from within the cast. Sara Porkalob (Edward Rutledge) complained that the directors didn’t go far enough with its political message, while also accusing them of creating a “false narrative by assimilating non-Black POC folks into whiteness” by “prioritizing the Black folks.” Page dismissed Porkalob as “fake-woke” and insinuated she was an “example” of “white supremacist ideology.” The overall message of the show is clearly conflicted – something the nation needs to avoid in 2026.

Much like Ken Burns’ recent documentary Benjamin Franklin, the directors tried to make the Founders complicated and tell all sides. But *1776* suffers from trying to have it both ways. No one can deny that Jefferson’s words had an impact. Starting with the French Revolution in 1789, these words spread across the globe. They served as a guide for the world and inspired a better future for humankind. The 1945 Vietnamese Declaration of Independence not only opened by quoting Jefferson but recognized what he meant in a “broader sense”: “All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free.” If we take that view then President Biden is indeed correct.

We are at the start of the road to celebrating our nation’s 250th anniversary. From the Boston Tea Party to Lexington and Concord to Bunker Hill, there are many milestones to commemorate. But how we remember the start of this country on the Fourth of July matters most because it helps us guide our future. If we focus more on the flaws than the greatness, we’ll be lost.

And finally, the answer to the inescapable question: *1776* is the better play, but *Hamilton* is the better show. Still, anything that brings the Declaration and our founding principles to a public audience is a good thing. By providing diverse representation both shows allow more groups to recognize the importance of 1776 (and I don’t mean the play).

## Why Malcolm X's Family Is Suing the FBI, NYPD, and CIA 58 Years After His Death

*Time*, by Nik Popli

February 22, 2023

The family of civil rights leader Malcolm X marked the anniversary of his 1965 assassination on Tuesday by announcing plans to sue the FBI, New York Police Department, and CIA for \$100 million, claiming they concealed evidence related to his murder. For more than half a century, the circumstances surrounding the notorious assassination have been shrouded in mystery, fueling long-held conspiracy theories about possible government involvement. Two men who were convicted of murdering Malcolm X in 1966 were exonerated in 2021 after serving decades in prison—and the New York District Attorney admitted that the FBI and NYPD at the time withheld evidence. “For years, our family has fought for the truth to come to light concerning his murder,” Ilyasah Shabazz, a daughter of Malcolm X, said at a news conference at the site of her father’s assassination, which is now a memorial. The civil rights leader was 39 when he was assassinated in 1965 at an auditorium in New York’s Washington Heights neighborhood. Three gunmen shot at least 21 times, as Malcolm X’s four children and pregnant wife ducked for safety.

At the news conference on Tuesday, civil rights lawyer Ben Crump said: “It’s not just about the triggermen. It’s about those who conspired with the triggermen to do this dastardly deed.” He claims that government agencies had factual and exculpatory evidence that they concealed from the family of Malcolm X and the men wrongly convicted of his assassination. Crump alleged that high-ranking U.S. officials conspired to kill the civil rights leader, repeatedly referencing J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI director who died in 1972. [...] The District Attorney’s office did not reopen the investigation until a 2020 Netflix documentary series *Who Killed Malcolm X?* and efforts by the Innocence Project renewed public interest in the case and prompted Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. to review the convictions.

Evidence unearthed by Abdur-Rahman Muhammad, a Malcolm X historian and scholar, and investigative journalist Les Payne made a compelling case that the actual killers were members of a Newark mosque, rather than Malcolm X’s former Harlem mosque associates Butler and Johnson. In November, a judge dismissed the convictions of Butler and Johnson after Vance acknowledged that “it was clear these men did not receive a fair trial.” New York City was ordered to pay \$26 million to the pair to compensate them for their wrongful murder convictions.

In addition to the unfair trial, some historians have argued that various agencies including the FBI, NYPD, and CIA were actively involved in the assassination attempt. Experts have said that these agencies viewed Malcolm X as a dangerous Black radical figure who needed to be brought down. Others have suggested that they did not need to plot to murder him since he was already a target.

Nonetheless, Malcolm X was under near-constant surveillance by federal and local authorities—as were many civil rights activists. The FBI first opened a file on Malcolm X in March 1953, and closely monitored him over the next decade using surveillance and informants. On June 6, 1964, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover sent a telegram, which later became public, to the FBI office in New York City that said “do something about Malcolm X.”

“Both the NYPD and FBI failed to disclose to prosecutors that they had undercover officers on the scene,” historian Zaheer Ali, the lead researcher for Marable’s biography *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, wrote for TIME in November 2021. “They decided instead to protect their assets; there seemed to be a desire to wrap up the investigation quickly. What paths of inquiry were avoided or cut short as a result? If these two men were unjustly convicted, then who else was unjustly allowed to roam free?”

Crump, the lawyer representing Malcolm X’s family, said on Tuesday that their lawsuit will allege that government agencies were involved in the conspiracy to assassinate Malcolm X. The New York District Attorney’s office has already acknowledged law enforcement’s failings in the case, saying in 2021 that the FBI and NYPD did not honor their obligation to disclose exculpatory evidence to prosecutors and the accused, including “information that implicated other suspects; that identified witnesses who failed to identify defendant Islam; and that revealed witnesses to be FBI informants.” The office also said at the time that FBI records suggested “that information was deliberately withheld.” According to Crump, these comments from the New York District Attorney’s office—combined with the city’s \$26 million settlement—are what opened the door for Malcolm X’s family to build a case against authorities. “If the government compensated the two gentlemen that were wrongfully convicted for the assassination of Malcolm X with tens of millions of dollars, then what is to be the compensation for the daughters who suffered the most from the assassination of Malcolm X?” Crump asked.

## Henry Kissinger is 100, but his legacy is still shaping how US foreign policy works

*Vox Media*, by Jonathan Guyer

May 27, 2023

“Happy Birthday, dear Henry,” they sang, and the man a few days shy of his 100th birthday blew out the candles, then raised his two arms with a Richard Nixon-like flourish. This was Henry Kissinger’s birthday celebration at the Economic Club of New York, one of the city’s most elite organizations. He had been introduced by the chief executive officer of the New York Fed. Here everyone was, gathered to celebrate Kissinger and what he represents.

5 Kissinger’s legacy as a Cold War strategist, influential adviser to Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, and jet-setting diplomatic shuttler has persisted even though he’s now been out of office much longer than in government and has outlived his peers. Despite his record for perpetuating atrocities around the world, he’s still called upon for counsel as to how the war in Ukraine will end or how to avert conflict with China.

10 During the Nixon administration, Kissinger opened relations with China and helped broker arms control agreements with the Soviet Union. But he also prolonged the Vietnam War and extended the conflict into Laos and Cambodia. As many as 150,000 Cambodian civilians were killed, more than were previously known, when Kissinger ordered the carpet bombing of the country from 1969 onward, as the Intercept’s Nick Turse reports. Kissinger backed leaders in Pakistan and Indonesia as each killed 200,000 people in neighboring territories, embraced Argentina’s military as it  
15 disappeared tens of thousands, and supported Gen. Pinochet’s military overthrow in Chile. Much has been written about his record. Yet three aspects of his legacy — the centralization of foreign policymaking power in the White House, the avoidance of ever apologizing for his destructive actions, and the corporatization of foreign policy — have been less covered. But they capture how America works as a superpower in 2023.

20 For those reporting on foreign policy, and especially in New York, one is always in Kissinger’s shadow. Even as scholars, journalists, and progressives make a credible case that he committed war crimes (an accusation he has rejected), Kissinger retains many admirers for his realpolitik prowess during the Cold War tensions; new books about his ingenuity as a statesman keep coming out; and he is still writing books, too. On the subway to the event, I saw a young man in shorts and a hoodie reading Kissinger’s new hardcover *Leadership*. I happened to stumble upon a tiny,  
25 1950s-style shoe store blocks away from the Yale Club, with a picture of Kissinger and its owner on the wall.

He still attends marquee international conferences like Davos and Bilderberg. Kissinger’s assistant told me that he has a tough time keeping up with his boss, even at 100. Kissinger spoke for an hour at the Economic Club as he slowly and carefully waded into Russia’s war, China’s rise, and the shape of US foreign policy. He has always been  
30 circumspect and extremely careful with his words. He stood by everything he had done in his long career. “My view is, we need to be always strong enough to resist any pressures. We must always be ready to defend what we define as our vital interests. We must also be clear about what our vital interests are and stay within those bounds,” he said.

[...]

35 When he launched the firm four decades ago, journalists raised many of the same questions that I think about today. It is ethical for a former senior official to continue to serve on federal advisory boards that give policy recommendations to the Pentagon, the State Department, or the president while also advising companies that are likely to profit from those geopolitical decisions?

40 Kissinger helped normalize this dynamic of being a consultant to big business and a public policy voice. His successors have followed this trend. Brent Scowcroft worked as vice chair of Kissinger Associates prior to joining the George H.W. Bush administration as national security adviser and later started his own firm. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, former Secretary of Defense William Cohen, and national security adviser Sandy Berger, after serving in the Clinton administration, each launched their own consultancies. Former Bush Cabinet officials Condoleezza Rice and Robert Gates started a firm together. And Blinken banded together with national security  
45 leaders from the Obama administration in 2017 to establish WestExec Advisors to counsel tech companies, finance, and military contractors, before joining the Biden administration.

Kissinger’s nondisclosure of clients has become the norm and set the tone across this entire network of consulting firms, which tend to only publicly reveal clients as legally required, such as when their employees go into government.  
50 “A big part of Henry Kissinger’s legacy is the corruption of American foreign policymaking,” says Matt Duss, who previously worked for Sen. Bernie Sanders and is now a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “It is blurring the line, if not outright erasing the line, between the making of foreign policy and corporate interests.” Kissinger’s firm has never had a website. Reporters stopped asking as many questions over the years of his work and his clients. Kissinger still sits on the Defense Policy Board that advises Pentagon leadership, and his current client list  
55 remains a closely held secret. As his former colleague Les Gelb put it in the New York Times Magazine in 1986, “Kissinger Means Business.”

## How anti-LGBTQ sentiment is affecting Pride

*Vox Media*, by Ellen Iones

May 28, 2023

Repressive social backlash and extreme anti-LGBTQ sentiment are complicating Pride celebrations in the US this year, even potentially inciting violence against queer people and gatherings meant to celebrate the LGBTQ community. Though LGBTQ people and by extension Pride have won important rights and gained fairly widespread acceptance in US political and social life in recent decades, right-wing politicians, religious leaders, and talking heads are creating a renewed environment of animosity and uneasiness for queer people throughout the country.

[...]

The theme of “protecting children” runs through anti-LGBTQ legislation and rhetoric, as Vox’s Nicole Narea and Fabiola Cineas reported in April. It’s become a means of proving conservative bona fides to GOP primary voters, including right-wing evangelicals, and it’s coming from the top down: Former President Trump announced earlier this year that, if reelected, he would “stop” gender-affirming care for minors, which he said was “child abuse” and “child sexual mutilation.” He also said he would bar federal agencies from working to “promote the concept of sex and gender transition at any age.”

As Narea and Cineas point out, several states have already approved anti-trans legislation. DeSantis earlier this month signed a bill prohibiting gender-affirming medical care for trans youth, and Sanders signed a bill in March making it easier to file a malpractice suit against medical providers giving gender-affirming care to trans kids. That’s in addition to a law already on the books banning hormone treatment, gender-affirming surgery, or hormone blockers for trans youth, which is currently being held up in court. Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma, and Alabama are among the states seeking to limit care for trans youth or restrict trans people’s ability to participate meaningfully in society, whether that’s through so-called bathroom bills, bans on trans athletes, or making it difficult for people to change their sex on official documents.

There’s also the very real possibility of violence against queer people this Pride; as Insider reporter earlier this month, the extremist group the Proud Boys has pledged to hold its largest-ever anti-LGBTQ “Proud” events this year. The “Western chauvinist” group has interrupted and protested at drag story hours in the past, and although their specific plans reported by Insider haven’t thus far included plans for violence, the group is known for inciting chaos and fighting at its events. “I don’t see how we don’t end up having more violence next month,” Heidi Bierich, co-founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, told Insider. “It’s frankly getting a little out of control.”

The present milieu has set back progress for queer people all over the country, not just in states that have passed anti-LGBTQ legislation. Violence against queer people — whether that’s via legislation, social exclusion, or outright brutality — has never stopped in the US. As LGBTQ people won rights and recognition through collective action and protest, such violence became less socially acceptable. But as the right has leveraged anti-LGBTQ backlash as an electoral strategy, the risk that queer people will be even more of a target for violence than they already are increases.

The concept of stochastic terror — that violent rhetoric and communication by influential people allow their followers to see violence as a viable political tactic, even without explicit instruction, thereby increasing the chances that at least some people will commit targeted violence — echoes Bierich’s concerns leading up to Pride month. The risk has already borne out in recent months; in November, a man entered Colorado Springs’ Club Q and opened fire, killing five people and wounding 17 at a drag queen’s birthday party. He has since been charged with hate crimes.

On a consumer level, institutions like Target, Anheuser-Busch, and the Dodgers have responded to criticism and threats from conservatives by walking back pro-LGBTQ products and statements, rather than standing in solidarity with a marginalized community. Target said its employees faced harassment over Pride merchandise, specifically a “tuck-friendly” swimsuit intended for trans adults, thus its decision to pull some products from its shelves.

The anti-LGBTQ atmosphere brings into focus the real history of Pride — as a celebration, but also as a protest. Though politicians, celebrities, and corporations have adopted the rhetoric of allyship in recent years, acceptance and visibility blunted the necessity of activism. AIDS is no longer a death sentence with proper treatment, and gay marriage is the law of the land. RuPaul’s Drag Race has found international success, and huge corporations sponsor floats at Pride parades in major cities; socially and politically, queer people have largely become part of the fabric of American life. But despite massive progress in the decades since Pride officially started in 1970, life for many queer people in the US is still dangerous and difficult. The high rates of homicide, violence, and harassment against trans people, and particularly trans people of color is just one critical issue facing the LGBTQ community; with the proliferation of anti-LGBTQ legislation and the right’s ability to stoke anti-LGBTQ sentiment for political gain, the threat to the queer community increases.