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The Survivor

HOW MIKE JOHNSON DEALS IN TRUMP'S WASHINGTON

by **ERIC CORTELLESSA & NIK POPLI**

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How Mike Johnson Became Trump’s Speaker

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The Brief August 7, 2025

Mike Johnson wins for the White House, U.K. police plan arrests at a Palestine Action protest, and more

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“Don’t you ever want revenge?” Donald Trump asked Mike Johnson.

It was late May, and the President was in the Speaker’s office venting about House Republicans who were standing in the way of his signature tax-and-spending legislation, the so-called One Big Beautiful Bill. Trump was half-kidding, but he expected allegiance, not agita. Johnson explained that seeking vengeance cut against his Christian faith. When the President gave him a stone-faced look, the Speaker offered a more practical reason: with a narrow majority, vendettas aren’t an option. “We don’t have the luxury,” he told Trump.

Johnson became Speaker of the House in October 2023, emerging from relative obscurity to take what one of his Republican predecessors, John Boehner, calls “the toughest job in America.” It requires managing a conference that has for years been nearly ungovernable, while pleasing a President who expects total obeisance and tends to turn on congressional leaders who don’t deliver on his demands. Expectations for Johnson in Washington were low.

But he has defied them. Since Trump’s Inauguration, Johnson has shepherded a series of wins for the White House: thwarting a vote

blocking Trump's sweeping tariffs, passing the Laken Riley Act expediting the deportation of arrested migrants, averting a government shutdown, and delivering pro-crypto legislation that blesses certain digital assets tied to the U.S. dollar.

Trump's megabill was on a different scale, a nearly $4 trillion supply-side bet that lower taxes for Big Business and the rich can stimulate enough economic growth to offset dramatic cuts in basic services for the poor. It slashes support to states for their Medicaid and food-stamp programs, and enforces work requirements that could strip health care coverage from an estimated 11.8 million people. It allocates $170 billion to complete a southern border wall and turbo-charge Trump's deportation operations. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) -estimates the One Big Beautiful Bill Act will add $3.4 trillion or more to the national debt over the next decade. (Johnson argues it will do the opposite.) In the weeks before it came to a vote, polls showed that more than half of Americans opposed it.

But Johnson got it done. "It was very methodical, step by step," the Louisiana native tells TIME on July 8, sitting in his ornate Capitol office, where a framed LSU football jersey with Mr. Speaker on the back hangs behind his desk. It took quiet negotiations with competing House factions; a high-stakes roll of the dice on the House floor; and, most of all, leveraging Trump's popularity to pressure dissenters. "Getting the One Big Beautiful Bill across the finish line," Vice President J.D. Vance tells TIME, "was a defining moment of his speakership."

As Speaker, Johnson is not a pugilist like Newt Gingrich, nor an iron-fisted vote counter like Nancy Pelosi. As he sees it, Trump won the presidency with a mandate to reshape government, and his role is to execute that vision. Johnson has given the President what he previously lacked: a Speaker willing to turn the House into an instrument of Trump's agenda. "We are a well-oiled machine now,"

Johnson says. “That’s a very different dynamic than what took place in the first term.”

That dynamic, critics say, compromises traditional Republican principles and surrenders the independent power of Congress to placate the President. “Is he a rubber stamp, or Speaker of the House?” Democratic Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York tells TIME. Johnson has handed Congress’s constitutional authority to impose tariffs and approve acts of war to the White House, while looking the other way as Trump ignores the law it passed banning TikTok in the U.S. He also sent his members home a day early to defuse a fight over releasing files about the deceased sexual predator Jeffrey Epstein, whose past relationship

with the President has led to a rift within Trump's base. But Johnson has succeeded in Trump's GOP in part by aligning the Legislative Branch behind Trump's goals. It's a collaboration that is changing America.

Not long before he squeaked Trump's megabill through the House, Johnson feared it all might fall apart. Trump and Johnson had set a July 4 deadline to sign the measure into law. Around 2 a.m. on July 3, the Speaker was still nine votes shy of clearing a major hurdle: passing a rule setting terms for consideration of the bill on the House floor. Tucked in his private hideaway office in the Capitol, Johnson got word from a lieutenant that they might be able to win over an unlikely agitator: Representative Thomas Massie of Kentucky.

Johnson was skeptical. Massie was such a perpetual thorn in the side of the GOP that House leaders didn't bother to whip his vote anymore. But when Representative Tim Burchett brought him into Johnson's office, Massie was willing to deal. He told Johnson that the attack ads Trump's super PAC had been running against him in his own district were devastating, according to multiple sources familiar with the exchange. He was open to advancing the bill, though not voting for its final passage, in exchange for a truce.

Johnson got Trump on the phone, and the trio struck a compromise, the sources say: Massie would vote for the rules package, and Trump would stop the ads. (Massie's office did not respond to multiple requests for comment.) With Massie on board, the procedural motion passed on the House floor an hour later, setting the stage for the bill to pass.

Johnson had prayed for such a breakthrough hours earlier, in the Capitol chapel with his wife. For the Speaker, the product of an unplanned pregnancy, religion has long been a cornerstone of his life. His parents, who were high school sweethearts raised in the

Catholic Church, rejected the advice of friends to have an abortion. When Johnson was a 12-year-old growing up in Shreveport, his father Pat, a firefighter, was called to a cold-storage plant because of an anhydrous ammonia leak. An explosion erupted inside the facility, engulfing both Pat Johnson and his partner in flames. Pat Johnson suffered severe burns; at the hospital, doctors gave him a 5% chance of survival. His son dropped to his knees to pray that God spare his father. After dozens of surgeries, Pat Johnson defied the odds. “God kind of miraculously saved his life,” the Speaker says. “Faith became a very real thing to me.”

Johnson became the first member of his family to attend college, and stayed at LSU for law school. He became a constitutional lawyer, working on religious-liberty cases and causes connected to the Christian right. In 2004, for instance, he defended a -Louisiana -constitutional amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman. Then, in 2015, a Louisiana state representative called to say he was leaving his office for a judgeship, and suggested Johnson make a bid for the seat. Johnson ran unopposed. He had been in the gig for only a few months when then Congressman John Fleming called to say he was running for the U.S. Senate, and urged Johnson to replace him. Johnson emerged from a field of seven opponents, entering Congress in January 2017, the same month Trump first took the oath of office.

One morning that April, Johnson answered a call from an unknown number. “Is this Congressman Johnson?” a woman asked. “The President would like to speak with you.” Johnson braced for a tough exchange. Trump had been trying to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Earlier in the week, Johnson told Speaker Paul Ryan that he wouldn’t support the measure because it was projected to raise health care costs in his district by 30%.

Trump didn’t wait to get past the pleasantries. “Mike, you’re going to be a yes on this bill,” he said, according to Johnson. As the freshman tried to explain his position, Trump cut him off. “Mike.

You’re going to be a yes.” But Johnson refused until his amendments were added. Far from starting a feud with Trump, Johnson says the episode laid a groundwork for their future partnership. “I think he actually respected that I had that resolve,” Johnson says.

Secondary image

Because of his legal background, the freshman secured a spot on the House Judiciary Committee. When Trump faced his first impeachment in 2019, he offered Johnson a place on his legal defense team. The next year, Johnson was one of the 147 Republicans in Congress who voted to overturn the result of the 2020 election and declare Trump the winner. When Trump was impeached a second time for inciting the Jan. 6 attack, Johnson again served on his impeachment defense team. His profile in Congress was rising, having served as chair of the Republican Study Committee, a powerful group of House conservatives, and then becoming vice chair of the Republican conference. But he was still relatively unknown until Florida Representative Matt Gaetz orchestrated the ouster of Republican Speaker Kevin McCarthy in October 2023.

One by one, ambitious House Republicans stepped up and took their shot to succeed McCarthy. Conference leaders rallied around

Steve Scalise, then Jim Jordan, then Tom Emmer. None could muster enough votes. For three weeks, the job remained open. The situation was becoming untenable. Democrats and Republicans alike wanted to send aid to Israel after Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, but they couldn't pass legislation without a Speaker. Johnson emerged as an unlikely unity candidate—a low-profile figure with few enemies in a fractious conference. After winning an internal poll by the GOP caucus, Johnson went on to win the speakership on the fourth round of voting. One of the least-tenured members to ever hold the job, he was suddenly third in line to the presidency.

Becoming Speaker, Johnson says now, "was like being elected mayor of a town that had been hit by a nuclear bomb." The challenges came immediately. Johnson passed an aid package to Israel and Ukraine, overcoming objections from members of his own party. Despite teaming up with Democrats to deliver the requisite votes, he pacified an obstreperous group that had booted his more seasoned predecessor after only 10 months.

"His temperament has served him well. He's a patient guy. He listens and members trust him. That is the essential ingredient to being a successful speaker," says Boehner, who knows as well as anyone the challenges of corralling the House GOP. "For a guy who doesn't drink, smoke, or cuss, he's a very affable guy." Representative Andy Ogles, Johnson's Capitol Hill roommate before he became Speaker, notes that he is hands-on: "Taking the criticism, taking notes, and then trying to come to a solution." It doesn't hurt, Ogles adds, that Johnson can defuse tension with a good Trump impression.

In February 2024, Johnson traveled to Mar-a-Lago to meet with Trump and his top advisers and devise a playbook to advance his goals through Congress if he won the election. The key was to package Trump's agenda items into reconciliation bills—budget-

related measures that need only a simple majority to pass. In the months that followed, as Trump hit the trail, Johnson and his aides worked on the details. “We planned this very carefully, over that long period,” Johnson says.

Weeks after Trump’s election, on New Year’s Day 2025, Johnson joined congressional allies and campaign advisers in one of the dining rooms of Trump’s Palm Beach mansion. Trump wanted to move quickly to make his 2017 tax cuts permanent, finish the southern border wall, and deport millions of migrants. He went around the room soliciting reactions. Trump’s inner circle, including incoming White House chief of staff Susie Wiles, close confidant Stephen Miller, and Vance, were among those who floated breaking up this sweeping legislative agenda into two or three separate bills, according to three people present. Senate Republican leaders, such as majority leader John Thune and Senator Lindsey Graham, were also publicly pushing for multiple measures.

Johnson argued the opposite. “If we break it up, we will do parts of it, and the other parts will never get done,” he told Trump. The President sided with Johnson. He wanted the bill passed in the House by Memorial Day. Trump and Johnson quickly cleared procedural hurdles that had blocked past Congresses, funding the government in March and passing a budget framework in April to advance the reconciliation bill. To win over moderate Republicans in purple districts, they raised the cap on the federal deduction for state and local taxes (known as SALT) to $40,000 a year.

But blue-state Republicans were hardly the only impediment. The bill irked various GOP factions, from deficit hawks to economic populists. The CBO said it would balloon the deficit, offsetting a fraction of the costs through deep cuts to Medicaid, food benefits, and clean-energy investments. Even many diehard Trump supporters grimaced, fearful of punishment at the polls. “There’s a

lot of MAGA on Medicaid," says Stephen Bannon, Trump's former chief strategist.

The world's richest man was another wild card. Johnson says he collaborated with Elon Musk on the legislation during Musk's tenure running the Department of Government Efficiency. Then Musk called in early June, Johnson says, as electric-vehicle tax credits were on the brink of being eliminated. "He was concerned about the EV mandate going away," Johnson recalls, saying Musk asked for a reprieve. "Elon, it's a little late," Johnson says he told him. "We've already passed the bill out of the House, and I was under the impression that you had fully endorsed all this." Musk did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

When Musk called the President, it did not go well, according to sources familiar with the discussion. The day after, Musk unleashed a tirade against the President on social media. Johnson says he was in the Oval Office when Musk lobbed the first round of attacks, and tried unsuccessfully to dissuade Trump from responding in kind. With Musk threatening to fund primary challenges against Republicans who voted for the bill, the fate of the legislation hung in the balance. "It complicated things initially," Johnson says.

Many Republicans shared Musk's concerns, but in the end, few wanted to get crosswise with Trump. After the Senate tweaked the bill, Johnson rushed it back onto the floor. "The longer it delayed, the more negotiation, the more demands of everybody, it would have been impossible," he says. Johnson and Trump's aides began working the holdouts who were led by Representative Andy Harris of Maryland, the chair of the right-wing House Freedom Caucus. The talks were no longer about the specifics of the legislation. They were about what the members could get in exchange for supporting it. Most wanted Trump to commit to signing a suite of cost-cutting orders. Then they wanted Johnson to codify them. Others wanted more bills to cut the debt down the road.

By midnight on July 2, they were still deadlocked. Johnson made a gamble, scheduling a procedural vote on the rule before he had the numbers to pass it. The high-stakes tactic had worked before on Trump's budget resolution and Ukraine aid. The thinking, he says, was to put the holdouts in a pressure cooker, facing the threat of Trump's ire. "He's willing to really play hardball with his own internal dissenters," says Frances Lee, a congressional scholar at Princeton University. "He uses Trump's popularity and his own procedural authority to really put the screws to them."

The deal with Massie was the last hurdle. At 3:23 a.m., the vote passed, effectively assuring the bill would get to the President's desk for his signature. Inside the Speaker's lobby outside the House chamber, Representative Rick Allen of Georgia lifted Johnson off his feet in a bear hug. "Only you can do this job!" Allen cried. After 14 months of planning and preparation, Johnson had gotten Trump what he wanted. When Trump signed the bill into law on July 4, Johnson gave the President a memento to mark the triumph: his Speaker's gavel.

Secondary image

Two weeks later, Johnson delivered more wins for Trump: a $9 billion rescissions bill gutting foreign aid and public broadcasting, and the first-ever law regulating cryptocurrencies, a win for the

tech-bro constituency that had helped sweep Trump back to power. Johnson quashed a rebellion from his right flank over the crypto bill: some Republicans wanted additional legislation to give crypto oversight to a friendly regulatory agency and ban the Federal Reserve from issuing its own digital currencies. To win them over, Johnson passed the first on the floor, sending it to the Senate, and promised to include the second in must-pass legislation later in the year. For now, he told them, they needed to give Trump something to herald “Crypto Week” at the White House.

There are other battles still to come: funding the government ahead of the Sept. 30 deadline and passing the National Defense Authorization Act. But the heavy lifting is done for now. The 2026 midterms will test whether voters reward or penalize Johnson’s loyalty to Trump. While many of the safety-net cuts in Trump’s signature legislation won’t take effect until after the next election, some conservatives are skeptical that the popularity of tax cuts can overcome the unpopularity of less money for Medicaid and the economic disruption Trump has created through his tariffs.

By reducing revenue and increasing spending on marquee MAGA priorities, critics say, Trump’s Big Beautiful Bill comes at a steep cost to both the social contract and the nation’s long-term economic health. Over time, fiscal conservatives warn, the federal government will spend more on interest paying down the debt than on national defense, with taxpayer dollars covering past borrowing rather than funding current needs. While Democrats plan to run against the legislation in the midterms, Lee says the verdict remains an open question: surveys find that most respondents disapprove of the bill, but that it has components that are popular, from tax breaks to enhanced border security. Johnson argues it will help Republicans on the campaign trail. “We’re going to be talking about it,” he says. “We can defend it.”

Johnson anticipates more challenges from his cantankerous colleagues. Already, there are signs of cracks. Even after Johnson

brokered a truce between Trump and Massie, the Kentucky Republican has ramped up his attacks on both men—accusing them of suppressing the Epstein files. “He’s the only guy that could do this, because he’s a nice guy,” the President said of Johnson recently at a White House meeting, according to two sources present. “I couldn’t do this.” Trump couldn’t tolerate the criticism or the insubordination; he couldn’t take a punch without counterpunching. In contrast, Johnson is willing to absorb the opprobrium, mediate the meltdowns, and hold together a fractured conference. He is both a punching bag and a psychiatrist for House Republicans who face the choice of either backing the President’s agenda or losing their job.

As always, Trump’s favor has limits. Johnson has the President’s backing only as long as he is loyal and productive. If the Speaker stumbles—if he fails to deliver votes, stifle dissent, or make chaos work to Trump’s advantage—he risks the same fate as his predecessors. And even if Trump doesn’t turn on him, voters may. A blue wave, or maybe even a ripple, would force him out of the Speaker’s office.

On July 18, Johnson hopped into the back seat of his armored car for the brisk ride to the White House for the bill signing. Sirens blared as the motorcade whizzed down Pennsylvania Avenue. “It’s cool for about half a day,” Johnson says of the spectacle. In the aftermath of the vote on Trump’s megabill, he recalls, one of his colleagues said to him: Are you proud that you made history? Johnson laughed. “No,” he said. “I’m so tired of making history.”

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https://time.com/7306839

The Tragedy Unfolding in Gaza

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The Brief

Updates on Gaza, Washington, and public health

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If any place had experience seeing civilians through war, it was the Gaza Strip. It's much of why the place exists. That stretch of Mediterranean coast was only even named while being demarcated as a refuge for Palestinians driven off their land by Jewish forces in the 1948 war that created Israel. Gaza's permanent status, like the

fate of the Palestinians, was never decided, however. And as the decades churned on, so did the conflict.

There was a devastating rhythm to it. Palestinian militants launched missiles into Israel from Gaza. Israel's military replied with airstrikes, at times with sustained campaigns dubbed wars. The longest lasted 50 days. In each round of fighting, civilians knew where to find safety: in the schools, clinics, and hospitals run by the U.N., which also fed them.

Nearly all of that has been destroyed in Israel's response to the horrific Hamas attack of Oct. 7, 2023—though not only by bombardment. In its war on a terrorist group, Israel also dismantled civic structures that support an entire population, with the bonus of undercutting the U.N.

Israeli distrust of the U.N. runs deep. Most of its member nations support the Palestinian ambition for a state of their own, and in 1949 it set up the architecture of one. That was the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or UNRWA. As its administrator, Philippe Lazzarini, put it, "The Israelis got a state. The Palestinians got UNRWA."

Read More: ***We Can Stop Gazans From Dying of Starvation Right Now. Here's How We Do It***

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With 13,000 employees, UNRWA was Gaza's largest employer, and after Oct. 7, Israel charged that a dozen of them took part in the attack. (One was videotaped loading a body into an SUV.) Asserting that UNRWA was as riddled with Hamas as Gaza was with tunnels, Israel cut relations with it in January. In March, as a cease-fire with Hamas fell apart, Israel shut down aid from all international aid agencies—collapsing a fragile but professional humanitarian apparatus that had kept 2.1 million residents fed.

No food entered Gaza during March and April. In May, Israel declared that it was taking over aid distribution itself, through what's called the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. Aid groups lamented that it reduced the number of food-distribution points from 400 to four and that, at about the same time, Israel launched a massive new offensive.

The result: now "the worst-case scenario of famine is unfolding in Gaza," according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), a consortium of leading aid agencies. The IPC is, in effect, the world's hunger watchdog: from sub-Saharan Africa to the Middle East and beyond, aid groups take their cues from its determinations about the food needs of communities caught in natural and man-made upheavals. Though it stopped short of formally declaring famine across the Strip, the warning was the humanitarian-world equivalent of a four-alarm fire. And it galvanized global opinion. "That's real starvation stuff," President Donald Trump said, after seeing images of wasting children on television. "You can't fake that."

Such is the elemental power of mass starvation. Its specter can, overnight, reframe a conflict that already has cost 60,000 lives, and fueled tense global debates on morality, antisemitism, the laws of war. When children are starving, the enemy is hunger.

Solving the crisis

We know what to do about that. And doing it carries benefits beyond saving lives. In Gaza, addressing famine means sanctifying life instead of normalizing violent death. The meaning of a war that, over 21 months, threatened to be buried under endless mountains of rubble now becomes about facts—the kind found on a medical chart, like the levels of magnesium and zinc in a patient, depleted electrolytes being among the first signs of starvation. Soon the body breaks down fatty acids to create the fuel to function, then proteins, and finally cells.

Read More: The Malnutrition Crisis in Gaza Will Outlive the War

Fighting famine calls for a mobilization, but not one that can be effective on a battlefield where, since May, more than 1,000 Palestinians have been killed while traveling toward aid. This kind of mobilization requires not only a steady supply of basic foodstuffs for the merely hungry, but also high-calorie, nutrient-rich pastes; therapeutic feeding centers for the acutely malnourished; dedicated clinics for pregnant women; clean water and sanitary regimes to prevent cholera—all the infrastructure of lifesaving aid that a concerned world rushed to erect in Sudan, in South Sudan, and in Somalia, the only other places famine has been declared in this century.

In Gaza, all that will amount to restoring a measure of what already was there just two years ago. Not the buildings, but the structures of mutual aid that constitute the core of civic life. It’s what Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, who was essentially Prime Minister of Gaza, threw into the fire when he concocted the Oct. 7 attack.

The next move is up to Israel, which within living memory was known less for its military might than for its ingenuity. This is the

country that, with drip irrigation, produced the miracle of growing food in the desert.

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Where Giorgia Meloni Is Leading Europe

Calabresi is TIME’s Washington bureau chief.

The Brief July 24, 2025

Updates on European leadership, U.S. grocery prices, and more

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It’s late afternoon on July 4 in Rome’s Palazzo Chigi, seat of the Italian government, and Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is walking the marble-floored halls. She has spent the past hour answering questions about her personal history, rise to power, and record in office with disarming directness. But now, as the interview winds down, she has a question of her own. “You are an honest person,” she begins in the crisp English that she says she learned from

Michael Jackson songs. “Is there something about Fascism that my experience reminds you of, about what I’m doing in government?”

Fascism is a subject Meloni can’t escape. When she came to power in October 2022 atop a movement founded by Benito Mussolini’s last devoted followers, critics in Italy and across Europe said her calls for national pride and the defense of “Western civilization” portended a far-right turn for the world’s eighth largest economy. President Joe Biden cited her election as an example of the threat authoritarianism poses to global democracy.

But Meloni has confounded her critics. At home, she has tacked to the center on some of her more dramatic campaign promises, like imposing a naval blockade to stop shipborne illegal immigrants. On the international stage, she has behaved less like a right-wing revolutionary than a pragmatic conservative. Meloni has embraced the European Union, NATO, and Ukraine, worked to isolate China, and labored deftly to reconcile the fractious relationships between America and Europe during the start of President Donald Trump’s second term. Along the way, she has won over leaders from across the ideological spectrum, from Biden to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to Vice President J.D. Vance.

Nearly three years into her term, Meloni, 48, has emerged as one of Europe's most interesting figures: a 5-ft. 3-in., working-class unmarried mother without a college degree whose rise has defied the expectations of her peers. She opposes what she calls "homogenizing" globalism, yet champions European integration. She is the first female leader of Italy and says that in her career she has "had to confront ridiculous stereotypes," but rejects government attempts to fix that or other forms of discrimination, which she labels "quotas." She claims conservative victories in stabilizing Italy's famously chaotic government and improving its debt rating, while also pursuing a policy agenda in step with the global cadre of rising authoritarian leaders: consolidating executive power, cracking down on the media, exerting control over the

judiciary, targeting undocumented immigrants, and limiting some forms of protest.

Read More: *How Giorgia Meloni Became Europe's Trump Whisperer.*

From all these contradictions, Meloni is constructing a new kind of nationalism: populist, nativist, and pro-Western, but committed to European and Atlantic alliances. "First of all, we have to defend what we are, our culture, our identity, our civilization," she says, sitting with arms and legs crossed in front of an Italian flag. Where exactly that leads matters beyond Italy. From Portugal to Romania, once ostracized extremists on the far right are overtaking traditional conservative parties, much like the MAGA movement in the U.S. That has presented a crisis for centrist European governments whose populations for decades after World War II shunned far-right parties.

Meloni's admirers say she has found a way to incorporate those rising far-right forces into the democratic process, neutralizing their threat. "We are the heirs of the right-wing party," says Meloni's top political adviser Giovanbattista Fazzolari. But the offshoot she founded, Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy), has, Fazzolari says, "become the party grouping together people from the right, people who are patriots of our country, people who are moderate, regardless of their previous political background."

Secondary image

Her critics see a darker prospect. Having established a moderate reputation at the start, they say, she is tacking back to the right now that Trump is in power, taking small but familiar steps to erode democracy and paving the way for a rising international alliance of right-wing extremists that threatens postwar European liberalism. “If you look at the way other authoritarian leaders behave, they are incremental,” says Nathalie Tocci, a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Bologna. What’s worrying about Meloni, Tocci adds, “is the direction of travel.”

It is a quirk of history that Meloni is fashioning a 21st century nationalism in the country that embodied the liberalizing 19th century version through its unification and, in Mussolini, created the catastrophic Fascist model in the 20th. Meloni has repeatedly rejected the latter. But she embraces the former in almost irredentist terms, declaring her intention to “rebuild our identity, rebuild pride, the pride of being who we are … whatever it takes.” Because Italy is one of the world’s wealthiest countries and is a founding member of the European Union, the nationalism she unleashes stands to influence where Western democracy heads next.

Meloni’s abilities were evident in mid-April, when she arrived in Washington for her ritual turn in the Oval Office hot seat. During Trump’s first six months in office, he has sought to demonstrate his alpha status by inviting foreign leaders into the West Wing and then bringing in the press for extended performances of domination. Visitors who fail to perform the requisite display of obeisance have faced consequences, as in the Feb. 28 blowup with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. When Meloni arrived for her turn, she went the extra mile to avoid missteps. “I’m a Capricorn,” she says. “So let’s say I’m fixed on some things.” She prepared a stack of cards with her positions on every issue that might come up, and survived the public test with poise.

Yet the telling moment came after the press had left, when the topic turned to Ukraine’s war with Russia. Meloni fiercely defended Zelensky and the need to support Ukraine to the end. Trump listened and responded, but without the exchange becoming contentious, Meloni says. “He’s a fighter, and I’m a fighter,” she says.

The episode stuck with Vance, who was in the meeting. “She’s extraordinarily direct,” Vance told NBC News on May 20. “She actually reminds me a little bit of [Vance’s wife] Usha in that way, where she can deliver an extraordinarily direct message without coming across as offensive. That’s just a skill, right?”

Secondary image

Meloni’s candor has long been one of her defining traits. “She’s always been like this, since when she was child,” says her sister, Arianna, her closest adviser and now the head of Brothers of Italy. Their parents broke up when Giorgia was 3. Their father abandoned the family to sail around the world, ended up living in the Canary Islands, and was reportedly later convicted in Spanish court for drug smuggling. Later attempts by the sisters to reconcile with him failed. “Honestly, he simply didn’t care about us,” says Arianna.

After his departure, the family lived in a nice apartment in a well-to-do Roman neighborhood. One evening the two girls were playing house with stuffed animals and, not wanting to turn on the lights, lit a series of candles. “We had actually placed bowls of water close to every candle, but then we covered them with a duvet and stuffed animals, and then we went to watch cartoons on television,” Arianna recalls. The room was engulfed in flames. When the fire brigade came, “they destroyed what was left of our poor apartment,” Arianna says.

The fire set the family on a harder course. They moved to a working-class part of Rome called Garbatella, built in the early 1920s for rail- and dockworkers. The sisters slept on a mattress on

the floor of their maternal grandparents' small apartment, while their mother lived with a friend until she got her own place nearby. The girls were deeply affected by the fire and its impact on their lives. It "gave her a greater grit," Arianna says of her sister, "that made her the Giorgia she is today."

Meloni makes light of the incident in her interview with TIME, linking it to the flame logo of the post-Fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI), whose youth group she joined some years later. "Maybe that's why I joined the MSI, because of the flame," she laughs. In fact, neither Meloni nor her sister has explained what motivated her to join the Garbatella branch of Fronte della Gioventu (Youth Front) in 1992 at age 15, though Meloni says the chaos of late-'80s mafia killings was one of her motivations to enter politics. The decision was unorthodox for the time. MSI had been founded and led until a few years earlier by Giorgio Almirante, a Mussolini follower who had written widely for the antisemitic paper *Defense of the Race* in the 1930s. The party was not popular, least of all with young people from a left-leaning section of Rome.

Read More: *Giorgia Meloni Is On the 2024 TIME 100 List.*

Yet Meloni found a home among a small group of Youth Front outsiders who dubbed themselves "the Seagulls" after the 1970 novella *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, an allegory by the American writer Richard Bach about an outcast bird who achieves transcendence by going his own way. "We were a strange group," says Nicola Procaccini, who now leads Meloni's party in the European Parliament in Brussels. "We were seen sometimes as a sort of danger, sort of communist group inside the right-wing party." At night, they regularly went out around Rome to put up posters, often confronting opposing groups from the political left doing the same thing. "Often it ended in a very heated fight," says Fazzolari.

Meloni didn’t go to college because she couldn’t afford it, her sister says. She sold CDs and took babysitting jobs to earn money instead. But at youth meetings and rallies, she emerged as an effective orator and political operator. Her rise through the ranks was rapid. In 2004, at age 27, she won the leadership of the youth group of the party, which had renamed itself the National Alliance. Two years later, she won a seat in the lower house of Parliament representing Garbatella. Two years after that, she was named Minister for Youth in the center-right government of Silvio Berlusconi. At 31, she became the youngest Cabinet member in postwar Italy.

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She retained an independent streak. In 2012, Meloni and a hardcore group of former Seagulls bolted from Berlusconi’s coalition. It was a risky undertaking. Meloni’s startup party, Fratelli d’Italia—named for the first lines of the country’s national anthem—began life with 2% support. She built a national reputation by running for mayor of Rome while pregnant with her daughter in 2016. Meloni lost, but by 2018 the party had won dozens of seats in Parliament and rejoined a center-right alliance. The following year, she gave a defining speech, declaring in a tone of defiance, “I am Giorgia, I

am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am a Christian. You can't take that away from me."

When the nation united behind a caretaker government during the COVID-19 crisis, Meloni declined to support it. The move paved the way for her final rise to power. In 2022, she led a right-wing coalition and promised to impose a naval blockade on migrants in the Mediterranean and to stand up to "globalists." Meloni's alliance trounced its rivals by 18 points, with Fratelli d'Italia winning 26% of the vote and far outpacing other right-wing parties. They quickly united behind her, giving her comfortable majorities in both chambers of Parliament. Observers noted that Meloni was taking power nearly 100 years to the day after Mussolini's march on Rome.

Less than two years later, at an event on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York last September, the prominent pro-Europe think tank the Atlantic Council bestowed on Meloni its "Global Citizen Award." After a moderator lauded her for "championing democracy and justice around the world," Meloni was introduced by Elon Musk, who called her "authentic, honest, and truthful." Meloni had chosen Musk to do the introductions, and the two huddled at their table in focused conversation, according to one attendee, then went backstage for champagne. (Her critics say she was planning to hand some Italian national-security responsibilities to SpaceX; Meloni denies the charge and says she's never discussed the matter with Musk.)

It had been work to get there. Her election had been viewed as a jump ball for Italy's role in Europe and the West, with Washington and some European capitals worrying she might go the way of Hungary's Viktor Orban on international affairs, adopting a soft approach to the world's autocracies. "Russia and China saw the opportunity to push Italy to their side," says Maurizio Molinari, former editor in chief of the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica.* "The

reality is that nobody knew what was going to happen." Referring to the spread of authoritarianism around the world and China's efforts to undermine democracy, Biden told the audience at a fundraiser on Sept. 27, 2022, for the Democratic Governors Association, "You just saw what's happened in Italy."

Secondary image

Meloni shrugs off Biden's barb now. "I simply thought that he didn't know what he was talking about," she says. Her first trip was to Brussels to meet with the traditionally conservative von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, who had been skeptical of Meloni's rise. Italian diplomats worked the White House and the State Department, setting up a meeting for her with Biden at the G-20 in Bali. By the time she went to Washington for a one-on-one with the U.S. President in March 2024, he was among her most vocal global supporters.

Meloni's ability to win over skeptics is partly a testament to her evident talents. "You can smell when someone's a political animal," says one Brussels-based diplomat who watched her work the halls of the E.U. But she was also taking substantive positions in favor of Western alliances. Despite Italy's long relations with Moscow, Meloni was vocal about the need to support Ukraine. Just as important for the U.S., she distanced herself from China. Italy

was the only G-7 country that had signed on for China's Belt and Road Initiative, a far-reaching infrastructure-loan program meant to increase Beijing's global influence at Washington's expense. In December 2023, Meloni pulled Italy out. "There was obviously concern when she came in, given her party's background," says a senior Biden aide. The Belt and Road move, the aide says, was "very welcome." Across the West, left-of-center leaders concluded that in power, she had become a traditional European conservative.

Read More: *Why Europe's Far Right Keeps Rising.*

At home Meloni has taken a harder line. She has tried to expand the Prime Minister's powers and passed a security bill that limits some kinds of protest and expands punishment for others. She's attempting to "reform" the judiciary through a complicated set of moves that would expand the Prime Minister's control over prosecutions. Last October, Italy codified her long-standing opposition to surrogacy, outlawing the procedure abroad, a move decried by gay-rights advocates. She has attacked the independent media, suing journalists and media outlets for defamation multiple times. "They're doing the same things in all the states that are ruled now by the extreme right," says Elly Schlein, leader of Italy's center-left Democratic Party.

Meloni's signature position has been to crack down on illegal immigration. The courts have blocked much of what she has tried to do, including an expensive misadventure where she paid 67.5 million euros to build and maintain a facility in Albania at which to detain migrants, only to have it ruled a violation of the law. Human-rights advocates have found that undocumented immigrants who were intercepted and returned to Libya in a program championed by Meloni were in some cases tortured. "In rhetoric and policy, she has created a hostile environment for migrants and refugees," says Judith Sunderland of Human Rights Watch.

Yet others in Europe are interested in replicating an approach that Meloni claims has resulted in a 64% drop in illegal immigration. “You’ve made remarkable progress working with countries along migration routes,” the left-of-center U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer told her on a visit to Rome last September. “I’m pleased that we’re deepening our cooperation here.”

Meloni has also forged an alliance with von der Leyen, who leaned on Meloni to stabilize Europe’s relations with Trump after his opening trade-war salvos. The budding partnership has led to speculation that Meloni and her far-right allies may eventually usurp power from the more traditional conservative bloc in Brussels, just as she has united the center and far-right parties in Italy. Says *La Repubblica*’s Molinari: “Her majority is the only example in Europe where all the different identities of the right sit together in a government. They don’t fight. This is her political strength in European terms. She is in the middle.”

Italy is a long way from the authoritarian government that Meloni’s critics claim she wants. Meloni has disavowed fascism and anti-semitism. Her fiercest political critics acknowledge her tangible turn to the center. There are checks in place to prevent the kind of turn toward illiberal authoritarianism that has occurred elsewhere in Europe. After World War II, Italy’s political system was restructured to be hard to govern, heavily weighted to parliamentary power at the expense of the executive. Even many on the Italian left acknowledge that 80 years after the fall of Fascism, it is time for reform. Agenda items that receive support from the electorate and in Parliament can take years to enact, and by then the country’s famously ephemeral governments often have changed.

Meloni wants a system with stronger executive power, and she advocates for a democratic model that can accommodate parties on the far right instead of gatekeeping. Figures like Vance have argued that doing so is the best way to guard against rising

authoritarianism. But there is another possibility. By knitting together the array of right-wing blocs in Italy, critics say, Meloni may unleash forces that her nation and Europe as a whole have long fought to keep in check. “Every time I come [to Europe] I get more and more uncomfortable,” says Charles Kupchan of the Council on Foreign Relations, who served as President Barack Obama’s top Europe adviser. “In Germany and in Italy and in France, and in Portugal and in Romania, the center holds. But then it shrinks. And then it shrinks again. And the closer you get to what you have in poor old America, where there is no center.”

Secondary image

Meloni says her critics have invoked her far-right background as a weapon against any policy she adopts. “They’ve been accusing me of every possible thing, from the war in Ukraine to the people

dying in the Mediterranean. It's simply because they don't have arguments," she says. But the attacks bother her, and she comes back to them as she strolls through the Palazzo Chigi. "I'm not racist," she says. "I'm not homophobic. I'm not all the things they've been saying."

But there are plenty of members of her party who still nurse a nostalgia for fascism. The second in line to the presidency behind Meloni, Ignazio La Russa, once kept a bust of Mussolini in his apartment. Asked what kind of nationalism she espouses, Meloni says hers is "mainly a way to defend ourselves from a globalization that didn't work." A moment later, however, she admiringly quotes the 19th century French nationalist Ernest Renan, an influential antisemite.

What is unsettling about Meloni is not so much her behavior as her accommodation of the forces that nationalism has unleashed in the past, at a moment when postwar norms are fading away. Even she seems to grasp this. Once again after the interview, Meloni wonders how she appears to outsiders. "Are you sincerely concerned about something?" she asks. "That is my question." In Europe, where the ghosts of authoritarianism and its tens of millions of victims haunt every corner of the continent, it's hard not to be.

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https://time.com/7304882

Erling Haaland Is Already Outscoring Soccer’s Greats

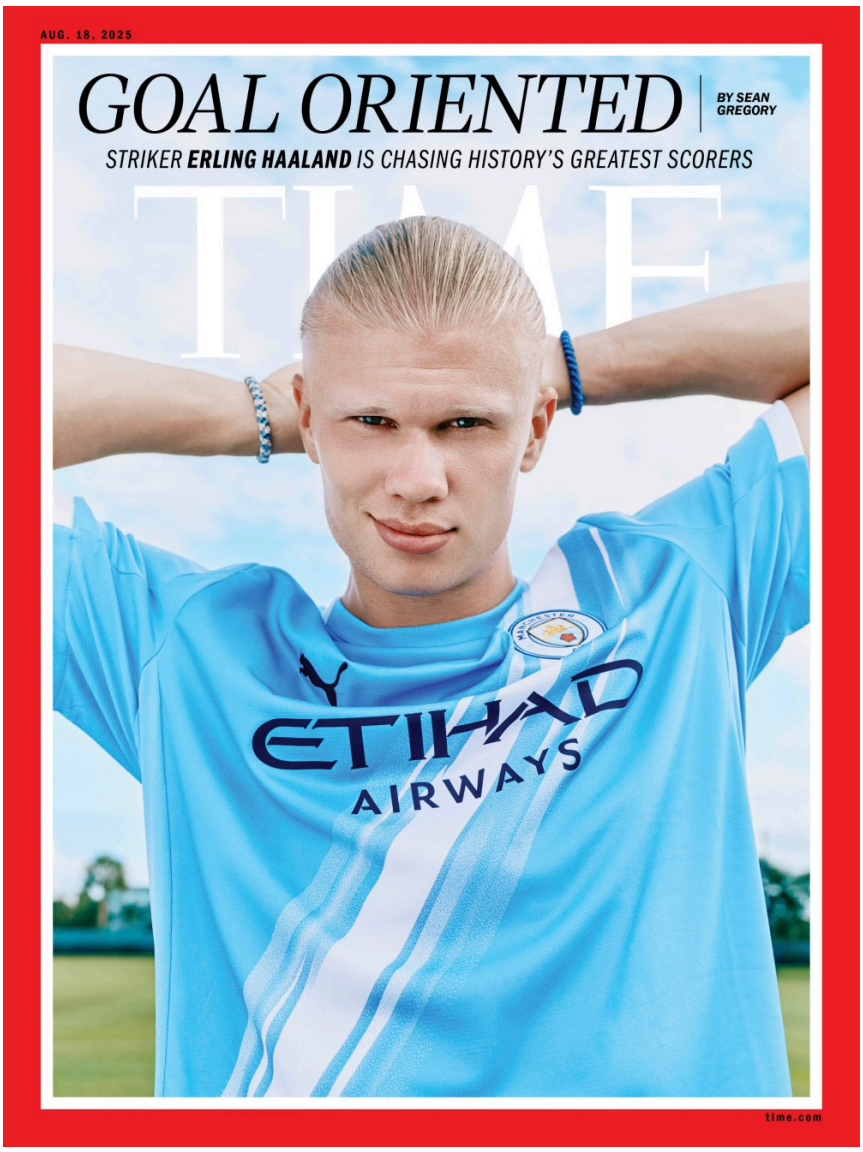
Gregory is a senior sports correspondent at TIME. His work has been cited in the annual Best American Sports Writing anthology nine times. His stories have won awards from the U.S. Basketball Writers Association and the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, and his work was named a finalist for Deadline Club and Mirror awards for excellence in magazine writing and reporting on media, respectively.

Two of the most valuable feet on the planet are burning. It’s a stifling mid-June afternoon and Erling Haaland, the superstar Manchester City striker from Norway who looks like Thor but sometimes celebrates goals by meditating in the lotus pose, is walking on the piping hot sand in Boca Raton, Fla. The heat is so intense that I start skittering to the wet sand in desperate need of relief, but Haaland, who has insisted on removing his sandals, simply saunters to a cooler stretch of seashore. “No pain,” he says, flashing a smile.

Manchester City has landed in the U.S. for the FIFA Club World Cup and set up base camp at an oceanfront Boca hotel. Haaland's tired from an extended training session that morning, but he's still in a jovial mood—Man City won its opening game in Philadelphia the day before. Minutes before our walk on the beach, Haaland had spotted team photographer Tom Flathers in the hotel lobby with three stitches above his right eyebrow from when a ball launched by Man City forward Omar Marmoush struck him during a practice session a few days earlier.

"If that was me," says Haaland, "he would have 10."

Or 10,000. The speed of Haaland's shots, and hulking 6-ft. 4-in. body, have created a goal-scoring machine the likes of which the world has never seen. Haaland holds the record for most goals in an English Premier League season, won the Golden Boot for most goals in the Premier League two years in a row, scored a hat trick (three goals) in his European Champions League debut—on three shots—and is the only player besides Lionel Messi to score five goals in a Champions League knockout game. He once scored nine goals—yes, nine—in an under-20 competition for Norway. On June 26, during Manchester City's 5-2 victory over Juventus in the Club World Cup—the 370th game of Haaland's professional and national-team career—he scored his 300th goal. It took Kylian Mbappé 409 games, Messi 418, and Cristiano Ronaldo 554 to reach this majestic milestone. Haaland turned 25 on July 21.



In soccer, tradition holds that when players score a hat trick, they receive a match ball, signed by their teammates, as a keepsake. Haaland's hat tricks are so routine that last August, after he notched another one for Man City, a teammate scrawled "f-ck off" on the memento.

"He's a human exclamation point," says Roger Bennett, founder and CEO of the Men in Blazers Media Network, the soccer-podcast company. "A man who can deliver just cunning, clinical acts of violence repeatedly, consistently, remorselessly with the world watching." Haaland signed on with Manchester City from Germany's Borussia Dortmund in 2022, scored three hat tricks early in the season, and helped Man City become just the second

English team in history to win the treble (championships in the Premier League, the FA Cup—an annual English domestic club knockout competition— and the Champions League, the annual event crowning Europe's top club). "I had not seen anyone arrive in the elite league in the world and just utterly bend it to his will," says Bennett.

Man City won Premier League titles in Haaland's first two seasons, in 2023 and 2024, which also gave the Sky Blues a record four consecutive season championships. But inconsistency and injuries—to Haaland and others—caused the team to slip to third place in 2025 and suffer its earliest Champions League exit in a dozen years. So starting on Aug. 16, when Man City opens its 2025–2026 campaign against Wolverhampton Wanderers, Haaland and his mates will seek to reclaim Premier League supremacy while also competing for another Champions League title. What's more, this fall Haaland will lead Norway into the latter stages of World Cup qualifying. He expects to return to North America next summer for his country's first World Cup appearance in nearly three decades.

So Haaland has a momentous 12 months ahead of him. With more Man City success, and a shine on the World Cup stage, he will succeed Messi, 38, and Ronaldo, 40, as the face of the world's most popular sport. His outings already double as pilgrimages. At the

game in Philly, Americans from New Hampshire, Colorado, Michigan, and elsewhere turned out in Haaland jerseys. A 9-year-old boy from New Jersey told me he talks about Haaland so much that his 4-month-old brother has started saying, “Errrrrrr.” Kenny Coleman, 10, traveled with his parents from Sydney to see his favorite player: Coleman wraps the back of his flowing blond hair in a bun, just like Haaland, and at the Man City party at an Irish bar the night before the game, the fans started shouting “Baby Erling!” at him.

Walking along the water, all feet safely clear of scorching grains, I show Haaland a cell-phone snapshot of Baby Erling. Haaland’s aware of the absurdity. Some soccer-loving kid from a farming community in Norway—not Argentina or England or Spain or Brazil or some other more populous football power—is now inspiring the world over. “Never in a million years would I think a guy from Australia would walk in the USA and try to look like me,” Haaland says. “No.”

In Bryne, Haaland’s agricultural hometown of some 13,000 in southwest Norway, visitors can go on the “Haaland safari.” For 750 kroner, or about 75 bucks, a guide will show you the giant mural of Haaland, in a Dortmund shirt, on the side of an old dairy, and another painting of Haaland in a Man City kit, in the lotus pose. You can visit the timeworn stadium of his first club team, Bryne FK, where for years fans could pull up in tractors to watch the action. Bryne FK awards the stars of its matches prizes like cartons of eggs, a half-ton of carrots, and cauliflower. Cruise ships docking in Stavanger, the coastal city about a 30-minute train ride to the north, send tourists down to Bryne. The locals are betting on a boost to the local economy. “I hope in the future,” says Frode Hagerup, a Bryne FK board member, “Erling takes us from two hotels to three hotels.”

If anyone reared in Bryne was going to put the town on the map, it was going to be Haaland. His father Alfie played for Manchester City and two other Premier League clubs: Erling was actually born in England, before Alfie moved back to Bryne with his family in 2004, following his retirement from professional soccer. Erling's mother Gry Marita Braut was a Norwegian youth national heptathlon champion. His great-uncle, pig and potato farmer Gabriel Hoyland, is the greatest player in Bryne FK history. "I remember when I scored one goal, it was such a good feeling in me that I was like, 'I want to become an expert on this,'" says Haaland. "Get this feeling again and again."

Though Haaland's youth coach Alf Ingve Bernsten gave players the weekends off, Haaland and his buddies would spend hours on Saturdays and Sundays playing on their own at Bryne's indoor facility. "It was very important that they learn by themselves," says Bernsten. "If I was a coach that stood on the side and yelled at him, 'Now you have to go there, left, right,' he will only react after my shouting. The whole process will collapse."

At just 15, Haaland suited up for Bryne FK in the Norwegian pro league. But he hadn't grown into his current frame. In 16 games, he failed to score against older, stronger players. "I just felt that everyone was watching me, and if I didn't play good, it was the end of the world," says Haaland. Playing in Norway as a teen was more stressful than performing before millions at Man City. "It shouldn't be like that," he says. "But in the end, everything is in your head."

Despite Haaland's failure to produce for Bryne, a higher-division Norwegian club, Molde FK, saw his potential. Alfie also thought moving away from home, at 16, would help his son mature. "That was part of the education," says Alfie. Haaland recalls thinking, "'F-ck, I'm alone now. I actually have to go buy groceries. I have to clean my clothes,' which I had never done before. So I remember calling my sister asking, 'OK, how do I do this?'"

Haaland says his mother, a teacher, was upset that he dropped out of school to pursue soccer. “She was so mad,” he says. “I’ve never been that scared. That’s proper fear.” (When asked if she is still upset, Haaland replies, “I think she’s all right now.”)

He got into meditation, a practice he continues to this day, while in Molde, and started celebrating goals with the lotus pose. But in his first 26 appearances for Molde, Haaland scored just four times. And in the week leading up to a July 2018 game against first-place Brann, Haaland performed terribly in practice. “I was soooo bad,” he says. Molde’s manager, Norwegian legend Ole Gunnar Solskjaer—whose goal off a David Beckham corner kick clinched the treble for Manchester United in 1999—had used Haaland as a substitute the previous three fixtures. So Haaland was surprised when he was picked to start. “I’m like, ‘F-ck, I don’t know what I’ve done in training this week, because I didn’t do anything good. But OK, let’s have it.’” Haaland, still just 17, scored four goals in the first 21 minutes of the game. “It’s a life-changing moment,” he says. “From there, it was keep going and attacking whatever it is to attack.”

Haaland wasn’t long for Norway. After two seasons in Molde, he moved to Austria to play for Red Bull Salzburg. It took some time for him to get acclimated: Not only was it his first time living abroad, he appeared in just two games for Salzburg in the first half of 2019. “You miss speaking Norwegian, you miss your family, you miss your friends,” says Haaland. “The trainer would just scream to me in German, and I was like, ‘I don’t understand you.’ I was like, ‘What am I doing here?’”

That offseason, however, Haaland had his nine-goal outburst against Honduras and welcomed the arrival of a new manager—American Jesse Marsch, currently the head coach of Canada, who has a reputation as an upbeat, player-friendly personality. Haaland went on an absolute tear, scoring 11 goals in seven games—including a pair of hat tricks—before making his Champions League debut in September 2019 against Genk, the Belgian side. The night before that game, he drove around Salzburg, listening to the Champions League anthem to hype himself up.

He scored in the first two minutes and notched three first-half goals in a 6-2 rout. “That’s when things really kind of started to explode in my life,” says Haaland.

By that point, Solskjaer had taken over Manchester United, and the club showed interest. “When a coach you had before wants you, of course you listen,” says Haaland. But in December 2019, Haaland signed on with Dortmund, a club known for cultivating young talent. He again took a step up in competition, and in Germany he continued to produce at a prolific pace, scoring 86 goals in 89 games. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he let his hair grow out and started wrapping it in his now signature bun. Why? “Because my father didn’t want me to do it,” he says. “But if you do it, you have to perform. You cannot be with the bun and don’t perform.”

Haaland's Dortmund contract contained a release clause that kicked in after the 2022 season. Real Madrid and others came calling. He lost sleep over his decision. Haaland used to wear a Man City kit to youth practices in Norway. He donned a Man City shirt that said dad as a toddler. But even more than sentiment, Man City's need for a pure striker up front appealed to Haaland, who signed a five-year deal with the team. "I felt that this was the last missing piece in the puzzle," says Haaland. "Even though they did so well, I still felt I was so wanted here. And this also gave me kind of a boost and a confidence to come in and just smash everything."

He's done just that. In March, Haaland placed a penalty shot in the right side of the net against Brighton, making him the first player in Premier League history to reach 100 goal contributions (84 goals and 16 assists) in under 100 games. "Er-ling!" the Etihad Stadium announcer cried out. "Haa-land!" the crowd of almost 53,000 responded. "It's an absolute dream to be playing alongside him," says Man City winger Savinho, from Brazil.

Initially, there were concerns. "It was always a culture where no one was bigger than the club," says Man City defender Nathan Ake, of the Netherlands, who joined in 2020. "It is a proper team. And when you make statement signings like that, maybe people think, 'Is the dynamic going to change?'"

Strikers, by nature, must behave selfishly. "The ball has to be on your mind," says Manchester City CEO Ferran Soriano, who was vice chairman and CEO of Barcelona during Messi's days in La Liga. Soriano compares Haaland with Ronaldo. "You can see a teammate scoring a goal, and him not celebrating," Soriano says of Ronaldo. "Because he thinks, 'I should have scored.' And it's not that he's a bad person. But that's the mentality. Erling is different. Erling scores a lot of goals, but he also enjoys when other teammates do it. That is impressive."

To the delight of Man City players, Haaland can hold his own in trash-talking sessions. “We have an interesting kind of banter at the training ground, where we just hammer each other,” says Ake. “He fit in with that straightaway.”

For Ake and others, Haaland’s oddball biohacking habits serve as fodder. He cherishes ice baths. He wears glasses that filter out blue light, which can disrupt sleep, before bed. He sometimes eats cow heart. “For me, to eat as natural and as clean as possible is an important thing,” Haaland says. He gets it from a farm near his home in England. Haaland has a cow-heart guy.

Man City's marketing arm at first fretted about Haaland's reputation for giving churlish interviews. While with Dortmund, he often offered uninterested one- or two-word answers to reporters' questions. A YouTube compilation of Haaland media interactions, "Erling Haaland wasn't made for interviews"—#cringe is in the subtitle—has 2 million views. Critics like Piers Morgan called him arrogant. "I'd say he isn't programmed for basic manners," Morgan wrote on Twitter in 2020.

Haaland's more engaging with the press these days. "Yes, I'm more older and mature, that's for sure," says Haaland, who welcomed his first child in December. But he also blames the media for some of his less-than-effusive responses. "You would ask, 'How was the weather today?' I would answer, 'It's good,'" he says. "You get what you ask for. That was my whole point of all of this. You ask stupid questions, you will get a stupid answer back."

At the risk of sounding stupid, I ask Haaland if he's the best player in the world right now. "No," he says. "I'm one of them." Messi and Ronaldo have reigned atop global soccer for nearly two decades. Haaland can't imagine himself—or his modern-day colleagues—reaching their rarefied air. "Their records, no one is ever going to take them," he says. "Not even me."

Bitter supporters of rival Manchester United—still the second most valuable soccer club in the world, according to *Forbes*—chalk up Man City's success to economics. According to many Man U fans, ever since Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, a member of the Abu Dhabi royal family and vice president of the United Arab Emirates, bought City in 2008, his oil wealth has purchased players and championships. Meanwhile Man U's owners, the Glazer family of the U.S., have burdened the club with debts and losing: Man U hasn't won the Premiership in a dozen years. And, these fans argue, Haaland's overrated. "He's a big galoot," says United supporter Christine Maun, 73, while watching a midweek Man U game in a

Manchester pub in March. “If he wasn’t playing for City, he’d never score what he scores. He’s not a classy player. Just stands there.”

That’s a common knock on Haaland: he’s a so-called tap-in merchant, a player who converts easy goals while his teammates do the dribbling and passing. Prompted to respond to that label, Haaland laughs. “What’s the most difficult thing in football?” Haaland asks, rhetorically. “If you’re a tap-in merchant, that means you’re scoring a lot of goals, no? There you kind of have the answer. I like it if people call me a tap-in merchant. I love it. That

means you're doing something right. That a lot of other people can't."

Plus, it takes skill and athleticism to position yourself to convert those chances. "His football IQ is off the charts," says former Premier League midfielder Robbie Earle, now an analyst for NBC Sports. "He has to think ahead. He's seeing pictures before most other players see them on the pitch. It's almost like a mathematician who can work out the algorithm and the conundrum quicker than anybody else."

It has all added up to Haaland's signing a mammoth 9½-year contract in January. Haaland is making a commitment to Man City even though the club has been charged with breaches of financial regulations, from the 2009–2010 to 2017–2018 seasons, that could result in fines, the stripping of championships, or even expulsion from the Premier League. Man City has denied the charges and is awaiting a verdict by an independent commission. "I spoke with the bosses, and in the end, I believe them," says Haaland. "It's such a tricky situation for me to even sit there and speak about, because I wasn't really involved in it. So I think the club knows what they're doing. They will sort it out."

The contract is the longest in Premier League history. "This feels really normal for me to do," says Haaland about the signing. "They have so much trust in me. Got the good feeling inside my body."

Haaland shouldn't be strolling along the Atlantic Ocean right now. Not because his fair skin is so exposed to the fiery Florida sun (though there's that). No, he should be on vacation, recuperating from the grind of this past season—where he missed six weeks with an ankle injury—and resting his body for the next one, which could see Haaland playing upwards of 70 games between the Premier League, cup competitions, World Cup qualifying, and the World Cup, which kicks off next June 11 in Mexico City. But the

soccer calendar, always eager to cash in on the popularity of players like Haaland, called for a more expansive Club World Cup this offseason. “Every footballer is waiting the whole year for holidays,” says Haaland, as a breeze drifts in off the ocean. “But as well, the people that have holidays now, they would love to be here.”

He did depart the U.S. earlier than expected: on June 30, Saudi club Al Hilal upset Manchester City 4-3 in the Round of 16 (Haaland scored a second-half equalizer in that game, in addition to two other goals in earlier ones). It’s been that sort of year for Man City. Haaland still finished second in goals per match in the Premier League, behind Liverpool’s Mohamed Salah. But rocky moments stood out.

In September, a camera caught Haaland telling Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta to “stay humble” after Man City scored late to draw with the Gunners, 2-2. At one point in the match, he also shouted, “Who the f-ck are you?” at Arsenal rookie Myles Lewis-Skelly. This all caused a row. So during the rematch in London in February, Arsenal fans could be heard singing “stay humble” during Arsenal’s 5-1 annihilation of the road team. They added a derogatory word. When Lewis-Skelly scored a goal in the second half, he mimicked Haaland’s lotus celebration.

Haaland has no “stay humble” regrets. “I think it’s an important phrase, which a lot of people should use, including myself,” he says. “It’s one of the most important things, as individuals, to do.” He takes the chants in stride. “They won the game 5-1,” says Haaland. “So yeah, they got me.” And Lewis-Skelly’s not the first person to send up Haaland’s ritual: Brazilian superstar Neymar did the same thing after scoring for Paris Saint-Germain against Dortmund in a 2020 Champions League game. “If he wanted to use that moment to mock me, that’s fair enough for him,” says Haaland. “Whatever he wants to do, he can do.”

In May, Manchester City still had an opportunity to finish off a disappointing campaign with a trophy, in the FA Cup final at Wembley Stadium. But Crystal Palace won 1-0. Soccer pundits, including English legend Wayne Rooney, knocked Haaland for declining to take a penalty shot before the half. Instead, Haaland gave the ball to Marmoush, who joined Man City from Eintracht Frankfurt, of the Bundesliga, in January. The Crystal Palace keeper, Dean Henderson, stopped Marmoush’s attempt. “Erling Haaland is a world-class forward, but when we’re talking about Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, there is no way they are giving that ball away,” Rooney told BBC One.

Haaland doesn’t dispute Rooney’s comments. “I shouldn’t have given it to a new player,” he says. “So all the responsibility is on me. I put him in this situation. I had a good feeling on him. But I should have taken it myself.”

Man City manager Pep Guardiola, one of the world’s most respected football minds having won a dozen league titles in Spain, Germany, and England over 16 seasons, has named Haaland to a four-person leadership council for the team next season. He’s the youngest member of the group by more than three years. “I’m quite calm in my head,” Haaland says. “That’s a good thing to bring to others as well, even when the situation can be a bit wild.” He’s

already put last season behind him. “I almost forgot it until you started speaking about it,” says Haaland. “I cannot keep on thinking about last season. That last season was not good enough, this or that. That’s the best part of football. There’s always something new that’s coming. You have to think about what is coming next and live in the present moment.”

Norway, meanwhile, has won all four of its World Cup qualifying matches so far. I ask Haaland if he thinks the U.S., which as one of the host countries automatically qualifies for the 2026 World Cup, can win it. Haaland turns the tables, asking me who has a better

chance to win, the U.S. or Norway. “You don’t have to answer it,” he says. “But Norway will never win the World Cup.” The nation last appeared in the event in 1998. “If we would qualify for the World Cup, it would be like another big nation winning it,” Haaland says. “It would be the biggest party ever. Scenes in Oslo would be incredible.”

He’s a realist. And a bit of a diplomat. “I don’t want to be that guy that says the USA is never going to win the World Cup, then they actually win it,” says Haaland, through a hint of laughter. “So there’s a 1% chance they’re going to do it. Norway has a 0.5.”

Haaland’s growing fond of the U.S. The previous day, during the second half of Man City’s 2-0 victory over Moroccan side Wydad AC in Philadelphia, his entrance onto the pitch provided the game’s loudest moment. “I didn’t know I was famous in the U.S.,” says Haaland. “Everyone knows who I am.” He’s watched *Yellowstone* and wouldn’t mind exploring Montana. “Get what is the guy, Costner, to drive me around,” he says, laughing. While in the passenger seat of a rental car later in the day—he asks the driver to pull over until he hooks up his Bluetooth to play thump-thump dance music—Haaland spots one of the oversize American pickup trucks that he admires. “Look at that,” he says. “That’s a f-cking car. I’m going to go out and ask for a photo with it.” He was less impressed with a Cybertruck rumbling around South Florida. “It’s so weird,” he says. All the stoplights reminded him that Bryne has none.

He won’t even rule out a move to Major League Soccer in the U.S., à la Messi and Beckham, after his Man City deal is done. “You never know what the future is going to bring,” says Haaland. “What Messi is doing now is incredible. Also what Beckham did, it’s amazing.”

As our beach time concludes, I ask Haaland what crosses his mind as he looks out at the ocean. “Freedom,” he says. “If you drive with a boat straight out, you’re all alone. I feel that is freedom. I also feel peace. Even though there’s not peace in the world.”

So why not take a boat out there while he’s in town? “I will do it on the holidays,” he says. “Find my inner peace.” In the meantime, there’s always lotus pose on the pitch.

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https://time.com/7303602

The Jeffrey Epstein Scandal Is Snowballing and Trump Can't Seem to Stop It

Elliott is a senior correspondent at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C., bureau, where he covers national campaigns, elections, and government. He also writes TIME's politics newsletter, The D.C. Brief.

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Here's the thing about conspiracy theories: once they take hold, there's no turning back. And when you layer over them a political ideology and make Donald Trump the lead pitchman, they metastasize at a pace beyond control.

Trump has openly flirted with nearly every major conspiracy theory of the last half century, and championed one of the most reckless through his insistence without evidence that the 2020 election was stolen. Add to those doozies this latest from the Trumpist legions: that the MAGAverse is being denied the truth about how registered sex-offender billionaire Jeffrey Epstein lived

and died after years of a promised epiphany if only Trump were given back control of state secrets.

Like so much else that grew into a headache for Trump, this started with his chase of a quick headline without thinking through how it might end. The Epstein saga has become a snowball racing down Mount MAGA that the President has lost the capacity to stop. In the snowball's immediate path? Some of the highest profile members of his administration, all of whom have gone quiet on what they had previously characterized as a dangerous conspiracy that needed to be brought to light.

But there are signs that this MAGA kerfuffle may be different from the ones before it. The cleft in the MAGA Movement is pronounced. Trump's base may not so easily move on to the next culture war battle or shiny conspiracy theory. This could reverberate into next year's midterm election and beyond, potentially shaping the second half of Trump's term.

[video id=taGuTHAH]

Former Trump strategist Steve Bannon is warning that as many as 10% of Trump supporters may defect over feeling short-changed, perhaps costing House Republicans a dozen seats next November.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, typically deferential to Trump's whims but mindful his majority is razor thin and in danger, told right-wing podcast Benny Johnson in an interview released Tuesday that he favors transparency—and to move on from this intra-party fight. "It's a very delicate subject but we should put everything out there and let the people decide it," he said.

In a sign that this is eclipsing almost everything else, even those eyeing a 2028 campaign are taking the bait and weighing in. "Release the Epstein files and let the chips fall where they may. This is why people don't trust government," former South Carolina

Gov. Nikki Haley posted on X. “You can never go wrong with being transparent. Redact victims’ names but release the rest.” And Charlie Kirk, who leads the populist Turning Point USA powerhouse with younger MAGA activists and has churned plenty of content out of the Epstein saga, has abruptly adopted a nothing-to-see-here approach and said he was done talking about it.

Let’s rewind the tape. Epstein was at the center of a network of super-rich and privileged people rumored to exploit young women and girls as part of a sex-trafficking scheme that was said to include a whole host of bold-faced names. Trump, who counted Epstein as a friend for over a decade, fed suspicion about the former Mar-a-Lago regular at campaign rallies and in online posts.

In 2008, Epstein pleaded guilty in Florida on two state felony charges, paid restitution to three dozen victims, and registered as a sex offender. A decade later, Epstein pleaded not guilty in New York to multiple charges, including sex trafficking.

Epstein died in 2019 in a Manhattan jail cell; officials ruled it a suicide, yet many Trump fans were convinced he was murdered to protect the hyper-connected insiders who might have been implicated should Epstein turn on his former pals. After all, there is a missing minute of video on the footage of his door the night he is said to have killed himself.

(Epstein’s former girlfriend and associate Ghislaine Maxwell was convicted in 2021 on federal charges of sex trafficking and conspiracy. She was accused of helping Epstein recruit and abuse minors. She was sentenced to 20 years in prison.)

For years, Trump hinted there was an Epstein client list. Weeks into Trump’s second term, Attorney General Pam Bondi announced it was on her desk, and MAGA influencers were handed binders of documents that they waved for cameras. (Those binders carried no real bombshells, just documents that were already mostly out

there.) But last week, Bondi and her fellow Trumpers Kash Patel and Dan Bongino—the director and deputy director at the FBI—released a statement saying no further disclosures about Epstein was in the offing: “It is the determination of the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation that no further disclosure would be appropriate or warranted,” the organizations said in a joint statement.

The memo went off like a bomb within the President’s political base. Trump’s biggest boosters were unswayed by his contention that the findings were penned by former President Barack Obama, who left office in early 2017, and “Crooked Hillary” Clinton, who has held no government job since 2013. Trump bristled during a Cabinet meeting last week when Bondi was asked about the so-called Epstein files, saying no one was really interested in that old chestnut. He then unfurled an unhinged social media rant, essentially telling his supporters to back the heck off.

Trump understands the power of the rumble—and the unpredictable nature of sparked kindling. Over a decade ago, he fed the wrong and racist trope that Obama was not born in the United States and thus an illegitimate President. He promised to release the files linked to John F. Kennedy’s assassination, along with those of his brother Robert F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. He promised to release the files on 9/11, which he famously claimed without factual basis included Muslims dancing in the streets and on roofs in metro New York that day. He similarly suggested someone needs to audit Fort Knox for missing gold.

Trump now faces this ugly reality: he promised the goods, and either the goods don’t exist or they are potentially embarrassing to him or his buddies. Either way, it has triggered his conspiracy-addled allies in a way we did not see in his first term.

Fellow agitator Laura Loomer—a conspiracy theorist who accompanied Trump to Ground Zero on the 9/11 anniversary last

year—has been calling for Bondi to get the boot if she can't pony-up proof of *l'affair Epstein*. In the interim, Loomer proposed taking it off her desk and passing it to a special counsel. Benny Johnson, the influencer who published his interview with Speaker Johnson on Tuesday, suggested that Trump's law-and-order team haul former President Bill Clinton in for questioning. And Bongino, who spent years peddling Epstein innuendo and out-nuendo alike, was so palpably angry that he and Bondi clashed in the West Wing and he skipped work on Friday while contemplating leaving a job he has openly hated.

For their part, Democrats are cautiously capitalizing on the opposition party's disarray. On Monday night, they forced a vote on the House Rules Committee on requiring the release of the Epstein files, leading the Committee's Republicans to be the ones to block it to avoid overriding Trump. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries told reporters on Monday he may get behind efforts to force the White House or Justice Department to provide a fuller accounting of what it knows about Epstein, saying either they lied about having the goods before or are lying about it now. For now, Democrats seem happy to help this snowball of a crisis keep rolling and allow it to distract Trump from a moment when he should be taking a victory lap on major domestic legislation.

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https://time.com/7302426

We Are Drinking So Much Matcha That Supplies Are Running Out

Schneid is a general assignment reporter for TIME covering U.S. and global news.

The Brief July 28, 2025

Updates on Trump, Colbert, matcha shortages, and more

Podcast ID – Short Length: `e7e6cbab-3cf9-435f-8462-73da71cdf29e`

Podcast ID – Long Length: `e7e6cbab-3cf9-435f-8462-73da71cdf29e`

Matcha tea, a powdered Japanese green tea, has become a cultural phenomenon in the West, so much so that its popularity has resulted in a global supply problem.

Western consumers have thirsted for the health option in recent years, a trend skyrocketed by social media—especially through

Tik Tok. At the same time, Japan has experienced a mass tourism rise in the post-pandemic years—in 2024, Japan welcomed a record-breaking 36.9 million international visitors, surpassing the previous record of 31.9 million in 2019 — leading to many mass tea companies and local vendors to report shortages of supply.

Back in October 2024, two well-known matcha companies—Ippodo and Marukyu Koyamaen—limited and/or stopped selling certain kinds of matcha, citing short supplies.

“Dear customers, We have been receiving an unexpected high volume of orders during the past few months. Taking production scale and capacity into consideration, we regrettably announce that availability for all Matcha products, regardless size and packaging type, will be limited from now on,” Marukyu Koyamaen’s website still reads.

Matcha comes from the same plant that many different teas come from— the camellia sinensis. The camella sinensis leaves can be made into green tea, oolong tea, and black tea. Though matcha originates from China, it has become closely associated and rooted in Japanese culture.

Matcha is a type of green tea, but the processing, form and taste differs significantly, and is made specifically from tencha, a shaded green leaf tea. Matcha also only makes up a small amount of Japanese tea production—just 6%—according to the Global Japanese Tea Association.

Yet, the demand has skyrocketed. And as a result, prices have also soared.

According to *Forbes*, the matcha market is expected to hit about $5 billion by 2028, an expected growth of more than 10% since 2023. Further, the Japanese agriculture ministry has reported that the 2024 tencha output was over 2.5 times higher than 2014. The

question is whether increased demand, small farmers trying to meet this demand, and a crop that is heavily dependent on weather patterns can keep up, even as the spring matcha harvest attempts to make up for the shortages of the past year.

This year, though, the Kyoto region of Japan, which accounts for a large percentage of tencha harvest, was hit with a hot and dry harvest season, say farmers in the area.

In 2025, Zach Mangan, founder of Kettl Tea, a Brooklyn-based company specializing in high-quality teas imported directly from farms in Japan, called this year's harvest a "high-quality but lower-yielding harvest" in a blog post in May of this year—the kind of harvest that will boost demand and lower availability, potentially raising prices even further.

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According to the Global Japanese Tea Association, the average price for tencha in late April reached 8,235 yen per kilogram, which is 1.7 times higher than last year's average. And according to producers, that can only be expected to continue.

"Over the past year, demand for matcha has grown beyond all expectations," Ippodo updates customers on July 18. "Unfortunately, supply constraints are likely to continue."

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https://time.com/7305699

Why So Many Seniors Can’t Afford Long-Term Care

Semuels is a senior correspondent at TIME covering the consumer side of healthcare. She previously wrote about economics and business news. She is a four-time finalist for the Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism, and she has won awards from the Society of Business Editors and Writers and the Los Angeles Press Club.

Aisha Adkins’ mother Rosetta was adamant that she wanted to age at home. So when Rosetta’s dementia started worsening at age 59, Aisha started looking around for options.

She quickly found that round-the-clock at-home care was extremely costly, and that her mother didn’t qualify for government assistance. Stuck in the middle, Aisha, who was 29 at the time, ended up quitting her job to take of her mother care of her herself.

At first, Rosetta just needed help preparing meals and reminders to take her medication. But as her care needs deepened, Aisha had to learn how to bathe and dress and feed her mother. She and her

father hired a home health aide for a few hours a week when they could, but most of the care fell to the two of them until her mother finally qualified for Medicaid through a complicated process called spousal impoverishment protection, which allowed her father to keep some assets.

“We faced so many challenges; it was really a struggle,” says Adkins. She ended up caring for her mother for ten years on both a full-time and part-time basis, until her mother passed away in 2023.

Many middle-income seniors are unable to afford care

As the U.S. population ages, many families are facing the same challenges. Long-term care, which is assistance with the activities of daily living either in a person’s home or in a facility, is expensive. Most people pay for it either out of their savings, or by spending down those savings until they qualify for Medicaid, which covers long-term care for indigent seniors. (Medicare does not cover senior housing or long-term care.)

But there’s a large group of people who are stuck in-between: they are “too rich” to qualify for the Medicaid benefits that enable them to hire at-home help or put loved ones in a nursing home, but they do not have enough money to pay for the in-home, all-hours care their loved one needs. It then falls to family members to make up the difference. Around two-thirds of caregiving hours for older adults in the U.S. are provided by informal and unpaid caregivers.

On one end of the spectrum, there are many expensive communities for seniors with deep pockets who want to start out in apartments and continue on to assisted living or more extensive care. On the other end, there are nursing home spots available for people who qualify for Medicaid, the government payor of last

resort, which is strictly for low-income seniors or people who have spent down their savings.

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But "there aren't a lot of middle-income options on the market, so inevitably people rely on family care and out-of-pocket home care until they end up qualifying for Medicaid," says David Grabowski, a health care policy professor at Harvard Medical School and one of the authors of a 2019 study about middle-income seniors. His research predicts that as the U.S. ages, many seniors will have insufficient resources for housing and health care needs.

People like Rosetta Adkins are often referred to as the "missing middle" or "forgotten middle"—the seniors who aren't wealthy but who also aren't poor. There just aren't a lot of options for these seniors in the middle who need care. One 2021 study estimated that a nursing home in the U.S., on average, costs $100,740 per year for a semi-private room, and that home care for six hours a day, five days a week costs $42,120 a year. The costs have only gone up since then.

By 2033, researchers at the University of Chicago estimate, there will be 16 million middle-income seniors who can't afford to pay for the health, personal care, and housing services they need. They will have to rely on family members—or on themselves—until they can qualify for Medicaid.

There may be even more people in this situation going forward, after the giant cuts to Medicaid in the Trump economic plan recently approved by Congress go into effect. Home and community-based care for low-income seniors is considered an optional program in Medicaid, so states can cut it when their budgets are thin. That may mean that in some states, it will take even longer for people like Rosetta Adkins to qualify for care

through Medicaid, putting even more pressure on family members to help out.

“When a state’s Medicaid budget is constrained, which is absolutely going to happen because of this bill, there will be limits on some of these home-based services,” says Allison Orris, a senior fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a national research and policy institute.

A lack of options puts stress on family members

Family members already face intense pressure to provide care for their ailing loved one while still maintaining their careers and taking care of children. One recent report by researchers at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health found that nearly half of U.S. states are on the brink of an unpaid family caregiving emergency.

That means that in many states, unpaid family caregivers are contributing hundreds of billions of dollars of unpaid labor. The report found that dementia care—like the kind sought by the Adkins family—is driving a lot of the labor.

“It is repeatedly the family caregiver who shoulders the immense pressures generated by health care shortages and rising dementia cases,” says John McHugh, lead researcher of the study and an adjunct assistant professor of health policy and management at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health.

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Aisha Adkins, for instance, set aside her career so she could care for her mother. Her life choices for the next decade were determined by what her mother needed: picking a graduate school nearby and then finding a job that would allow her to work remotely. Aisha, who is only 40, is already worried about how she

will pay for her own long-term care when she ages because she was out of the workforce so long caring for her mother.

This, too, is not uncommon.

“Many times, family members are reducing their own incomes because they’re taking time out of the workforce, or they’re working less,” says Amber Christ, managing director of health advocacy at Justice in Aging, a nonprofit that advocates on behalf of low-income seniors. “They’re risking their future retirement, which increases the likelihood they’ll age into poverty. So it’s really a multigenerational impact.”

There’s a reason there aren’t many options for middle-income seniors: companies can’t make money providing it. Over the past few decades, many expensive aging facilities have opened as investors put money into options for Baby Boomers who have extensive savings. But those places are out of reach for many seniors.

“The million-dollar model seems to work,” says Grabowski. “But middle-income models don’t seem to thrive.” Though there are options for nursing homes and facilities for seniors on Medicaid, they often provide a relatively low quality of care, with sparse staffing and dilapidated facilities.

Options for middle-income seniors are also limited because many people want to age at home, but at-home care is expensive and there are vast staff shortages, especially in rural areas. The industry is plagued by low compensation, unpredictable scheduling, and high turnover. Analysts predict this shortage will only worsen, with an estimated 4.6 million unfilled jobs by 2032.

Aisha Adkins says that even when her mother qualified for Medicaid, it was extremely difficult to get aides to consistently come to the house and provide care. Inexperienced caregivers

didn’t know how to handle her mother’s dementia, so Aisha or her father still had to stay in the home even when a caregiver was around.

“It really fell to my father and myself to ensure that she was safe at all times, even sometimes when the caregiver was in the home,” she says.

Solutions for middle-income seniors are expensive

Adkins says she now advises friends to look into long-term care insurance or think more carefully about putting aside more money for when they age. But even long-term care insurance, which requires people to pay monthly premiums as they age so they can have care when they need it, has proven so inadequate that only about 4% of Americans 50 and older pay for a policy.

Though most people spend down their savings to qualify for Medicaid, elder law attorneys can sometimes help people protect their savings from long-term care costs. “It’s worth meeting with and listening to an elder law attorney to find out how to protect your resources,” says Eric Einhart, president of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys.

A few states have tried to help people pay for long-term care by establishing state programs. The WA Cares Fund, in Washington State, is a mandatory program that takes a small percentage of the paychecks of working Washingtonians and then allows them to access benefits of up to $36,500 to pay for long-term care services. But that amount of money won’t last them very long if they need more than a few months of care.

The lack of long-term care planning in the U.S. is a contrast to many other countries. The Netherlands, for instance, has long included long-term care in its universal health care system, and requires that taxpayers contribute a chunk of their income towards

insurance premiums. In 2019, Singapore introduced a mandatory long-term care insurance program. Japan has had a mandatory long-term care insurance system since 2000; it requires people 40 and over to contribute.

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Most experts agree that the U.S. needs some sort of plan to help more seniors pay for long-term care, especially as Baby Boomers age. Otherwise, many people will spend down their savings until they qualify for Medicaid, which is going to get very expensive for the U.S. government.

"We're going to be swamped by just the pure number of individuals in the system who need long-term care going forward," says Grabowski. "We're not at a place politically today to talk about this," he says—because recently so much discussion has been focused on cutting services, rather than adding them—"but in the longer run, it's a discussion we really need to have."

It's something Aisha Adkins knows at her core. Although her mother passed away in 2023, Adkins is gearing up for another struggle. Her father was recently diagnosed with a type of dementia, too. He spent almost all of his savings paying for Rosetta's care. Now, Aisha is starting to look into options for him. She knows, from experience, that they will be limited.

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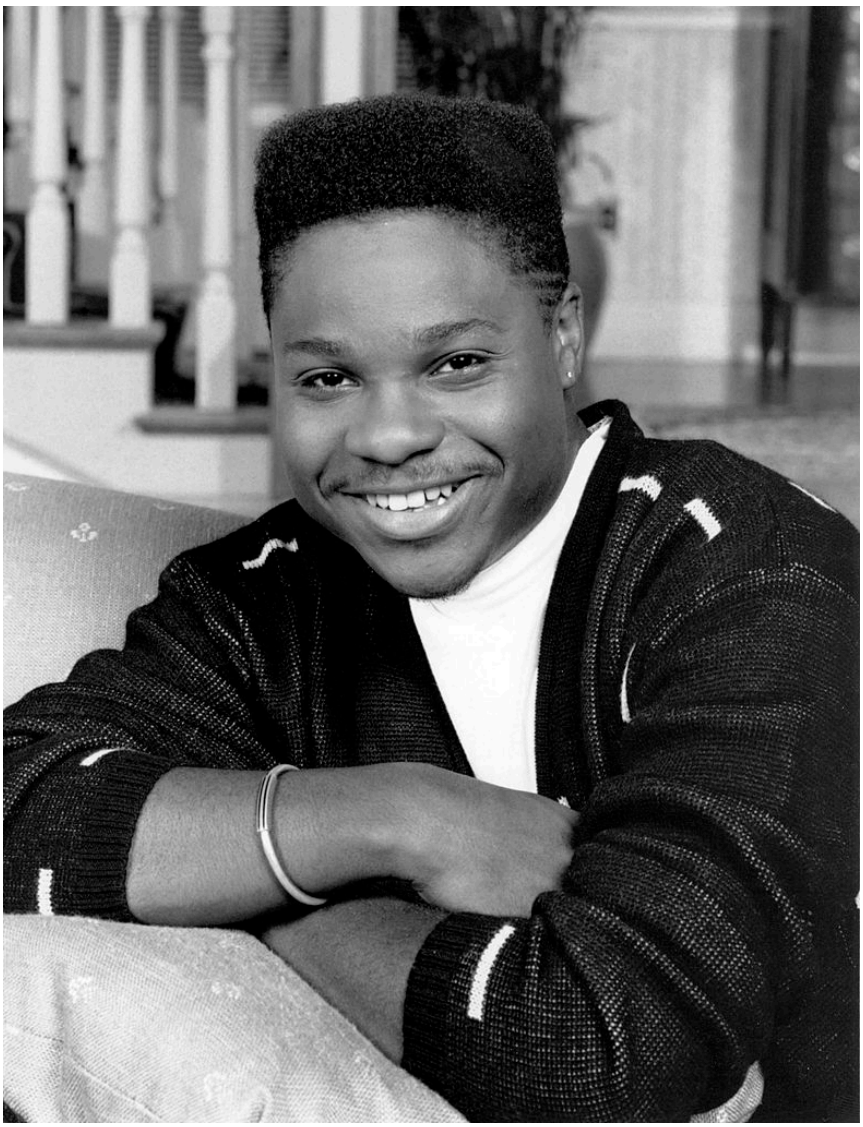
https://time.com/7304510

Like Theo Huxtable, Malcolm-Jamal Warner Defied Expectations With Heart

Mychal Denzel Smith is the author of Stakes Is High: Life After the American Dream



In the final episode of *The Cosby Show*, Dr. Heathcliff Huxtable is beaming with pride—his only son is graduating college. Over the course of the show's eight year run, this moment was not always taken as a given; the son, Theo Huxtable, was for years presented as a chronic underachiever, more interested in the typical trappings of teenage boyhood—friends, parties, girls, motorcycles. He was

never any real trouble, not aggressive, or violent, or otherwise disrespectful, but didn't seem to be able to live up to the expectations set by his successful father. His graduation from college in the finale is a triumph.

And as Dr. Huxtable sits there, watching the ceremony, barely able to contain his glee, there's a flashback to the very first episode of *The Cosby Show*—a classic not only because of the eight seasons of the one of the greatest sitcoms ever that followed, but an episode that stands on its own as comedic genius. In it, the stage is set for Theo's trajectory: he has brought home a report card full of D grades, and this isn't something that will be accepted in the Huxtable household. When Dr. Huxtable confronts him about the report card, Theo suggests that he is maybe meant to be a regular person, not a doctor like his father or lawyer like his mother. The Huxtable patriarch responds with a lesson on the financial reality of "regular" people, via Monopoly money. A bit later, a forlorn Theo offers a heartfelt thought. "Instead of acting disappointed, because I'm not like you," Theo says gently to his father, "maybe you can just accept who I am and love me anyway. Because I'm your son."

The studio audience applauds, and for a moment everyone feels the tenderness of the request—a boy wanting to be loved by his father for who he is and not what his father desires for him. And then a comedic break: Dr. Huxtable rises and yells, "Theo…that is the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my life!" The audience roars with laughter, as surely everyone who has ever seen it does, recognizing the exasperation of a parent wanting what is best for their child and a child's attempt to weasel out of giving any effort.

Theo Huxtable was, of course, played by Malcolm-Jamal Warner, who at the age of 54, tragically died on Sunday in a drowning accident while vacationing with his family in Costa Rica. The loss has been felt all over—the cultural impact of *The Cosby Show* can't be overstated, and Warner was an integral part of it; the show possibly doesn't even work without him. For everything it sought

to do in presenting a black family that was not mired in trauma, its heart could be found in Warner's portrayal of Theo trying his best to navigate the lofty expectations that come with such freedom, while also wanting to be a teenager, going through all the trials and tribulations that make up that phase of life.

Warner, through Theo, became the relatable, accessible, fun, stylish (with the exception of the Gordon Gartrell catastrophe), good-natured older brother/cousin/friend that a teenager of the 1980s could hope to be or befriend. It is the way Warner will live on for many. And yet for others, that image is tainted, through no fault of Warner's. Bill Cosby, the show's creator and namesake, forever tarnished the legacy of *The Cosby Show*, through his years of sexually assaulting dozens of women. That has nothing to do with Warner, who made no excuses for Cosby when asked about him, but it still lingers.

Which brings me back to that *Cosby Show* finale: one way to view it is as redemptive for Dr. Huxtable, that his harshness seen in the pilot episode and relentless pressure throughout the series paid off. Through his will, his son succeeded. Another is that Theo, having to overcome the long shadow of his father, managed to do so not only by being determined, but being gentle with himself and accepting of who he was—part way through the series, we learn that Theo has dyslexia, and that his trouble in school was not simply the result of his lack of effort, but a failure on the part of teachers, and his parents, to understand him better. But Theo never wavered in being possessed of his own confidence, or let the harshness of his father dim his good-nature.

The same can be said of Malcolm-Jamal Warner. The long shadow of Bill Cosby has always been there, darker in recent years, and yet he forged a career as an actor that didn't rely on knowing he was once on one of the most popular sitcoms ever to see he had success. He scored comedic and dramatic roles alike, ranging from the late 1990s sitcom *Malcolm & Eddie*, which ran for four seasons, to

appearing as O.J. Simpson's best friend Al Cowlings in 2016's *The People v. O. J. Simpson: American Crime Story*. He won a Grammy alongside Robert Glasper and Lalah Hathaway in 2015, and then was nominated for another in 2022 for his spoken word album *Hiding in Plain View*. He may not have become bigger than *The Cosby Show*, a difficult feat, but he became his own person, his own artist, something beyond even the relationship his audience forged with him.

My favorite of his post-*Cosby* turns is an episode of the sitcom *Community*, from 2011, where he plays the previously unseen ex-husband of Shirley Bennett (Yvette Nicole Brown), Andre. In a quiet moment, another character remarks, "Nice sweater" and Andre replies, "Thanks. My dad gave it to me." The sweater in question bears a striking resemblance to the kind Bill Cosby became famous for wearing. But Malcolm-Jamal Warner made it all his own.

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https://time.com/7304321

‘MAGA All the Way’: Tributes Pour In for Wrestling Icon and Outspoken Trump Supporter Hulk Hogan

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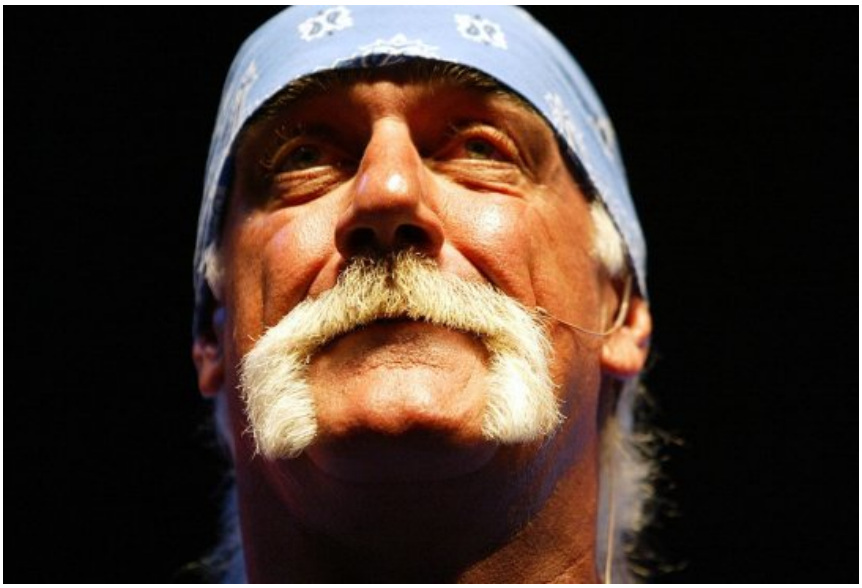


Donald Trump said he “lost a great friend” on Thursday.

“Hulk Hogan was MAGA all the way — Strong, tough, smart, but with the biggest heart,” the President posted on Truth Social. “He entertained fans from all over the World, and the cultural impact he had was massive.”

Terry Gene Bollea, who was better known by his ring name Hulk Hogan, was an icon of the wrestling world and, later in life, in the political arena. His family announced in a statement on Thursday that he died at age 71 in Clearwater, Fla., “surrounded by his loved ones.” Bollea is survived by his wife, Sky Daily; ex-wives Linda Hogan and Jennifer McDaniel; and two children Brooke and Nick.

Authorities said Bollea was transported to a hospital after they responded to a call for cardiac arrest and that there were no signs of foul play or suspicious activity surrounding his death. He had reportedly been suffering from health issues in recent weeks.

“He will be missed, but never forgotten,” the family statement added. “May we all take solace in the wonderful memories he left behind for the millions of fans worldwide whose lives he touched for more than four decades.”

“Greatest WWE Superstar of ALL TIME”

Bollea will likely be remembered first and foremost for his career in wrestling.

Born in Georgia in August 1953 and raised in Florida, he dropped out of college and played bass guitar in local bands before he was discovered by professional wrestlers Jack and Gerry Brisco in the 1970s. The brothers convinced Bollea to try wrestling and connected him with trainer Hiro Matsuda, who according to lore broke Bollea’s leg in an apparent test of his commitment to the sport.

“He was a nice-looking, big boy,” Matsuda, who died in 1999, wrote in his autobiography. “I told him, ‘I will give you the opportunity if you can keep up with me.’ He agreed … and became the most famous wrestler in the U.S.”

Bollea wrestled in Florida and nearby states alongside Ed Leslie, who would later become known as Brutus Beefcake. The two used the ringnames Terry and Ed Boulder or the Boulder Brothers, and Bollea would also compete under other ring names early in his career such as Super Destroyer or Sterling Golden.

The ring name he’d become famous as was inspired by a 1978 appearance on a Memphis talk show with actor Lou Ferrigno, who

played the titular superhuman in the Marvel comic-based series *The Incredible Hulk*. Bollea, who was 6 ft. 7 in. tall, appeared to dwarf Ferrigno, who was already renowned for his size. Bollea began calling himself Terry “The Hulk” Boulder.

In 1979, Vincent McMahon, who ran the World Wrestling Federation, met Bollea and reportedly wanted to give him an Irish name and dye his hair red. Bollea took the name Hogan but kept his hair blond.

Bollea instantly found success on the national—and international—stage, wrestling for different promotions in the U.S. and Japan.

New Japan Pro-Wrestling, which Bollea wrestled for from 1980 to 1985 and again from 1993 to 1994 and in 2003, said in a tribute that Bollea “left a significant mark” on Japanese history.

“Hulk Hogan was the greatest WWE Superstar of ALL TIME, someone who was loved and admired around the world,” Vince McMahon, Vincent’s son who ran the WWF and renamed it World Wrestling Entertainment in 2002 after a trademark dispute with the World Wildlife Fund, posted on X on Thursday. “He was a trailblazer, the first performer who transitioned from being a wrestling star into a global phenomenon. His grit and unbridled thirst for success were unparalleled – and made him the consummate performer. He gave everything he had to the audience whom he appreciated, respected and loved.”

Bollea “was a central figure in WWE’s rise from a regional attraction to the worldwide entertainment leader,” WWE said in a statement.

Throughout the 1980s and into the ’90s, a period that was dubbed “Hulkamania,” Bollea—known for his dramatic entrances to the tune of Rick Derringer’s “Real American,” his bulging biceps that he called “24-inch pythons,” his legendary rivalries such as with André the Giant, and his catchphrases including “Whatcha gonna do, brother?”—was the undisputed star of wrestling.

“WWE would not be where it is today without the larger-than-life characters that compete in the ring … and few, if any, loomed larger than Terry ‘Hulk Hogan’ Bollea,” former professional wrestler Paul Michael “Triple H” Levesque, WWE’s chief content officer, posted on X. “He transcended and elevated the entire business to heights never before seen.”

“There was no one like The Hulkster and there very well may never be another,” Levesque added.

Many other current and former wrestlers offered their own tributes to Bollea.

“Can’t thank you enough for all that you did for me and for wrestling fans all over the world. I loved you and I will miss you,” posted Steve “Sting” Borden, who called Bollea “the greatest of all.”

Ric Flair, whom Bollea called the greatest of all time, referring to himself as No. 2, posted a personal appreciation: “Hulk Has Been By My Side Since We Started In The Wrestling Business. An Incredible Athlete, Talent, Friend, And Father! Our Friendship Has Meant The World To Me. He Was Always There For Me Even When I Didn’t Ask For Him To Be. He Was One Of The First To Visit Me When I Was In The Hospital With A 2% Chance Of Living, And He Prayed By My Bedside. Hulk Also Lent Me Money When Reid Was Sick. Hulkster, No One Will Ever Compare To You!”

Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson shared a remembrance on Instagram, alongside a video clip of their match in 2002. “In 1984, I gave you your ‘HULKSTER’ headband back, in the locker room in Madison Square Garden – I was the lucky kid [who] caught it when you threw it in the crowd,” Johnson wrote. “Just 17 years later, and still a kid at the age of 29 years old — I’m standing in the middle of the ring and facing you – one of my wrestling heroes in the main event of WRESTLEMANIA. The match was to decide who would go down in history, as The Greatest of All Time.”

“You may have ‘passed the torch’ to me that night, but you, my friend,” Johnson continued, “you ‘drew the house’ meaning you sold out every arena and stadium across the country in your prime as Hulk Hogan, on your way of becoming the greatest of all time. From deep in my bones, and on behalf of this wild and crazy world of professional wrestling that we love, I say to you now, and forever…Thank you for the house, brother.”

“Superhero for so many”

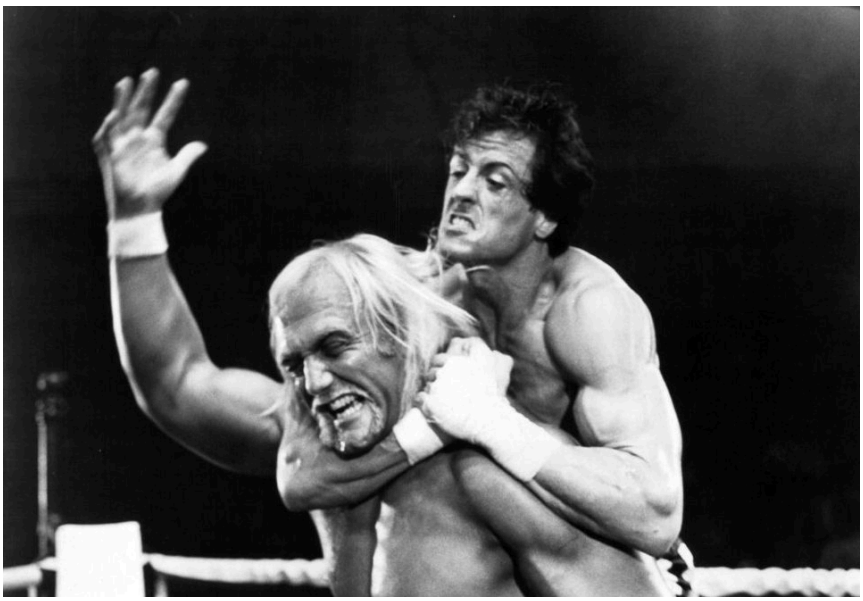
Actor Elijah Wood, 44, reminisced about Bollea after hearing of his passing on Thursday in San Diego. “Even if you weren’t a wrestling fan, they were a fixture of pop culture,” Wood said, speaking of how Bollea and his contemporaries seemed “ubiquitous” for people who grew up in the 1980s and ’90s.

Actor and TV host Mario Lopez, 51, described Bollea in a post on Instagram as “the only celebrity I’ve ever been truly starstruck by when I met.” Alongside a photo of Lopez as an adult with his own children meeting Bollea, Lopez wrote: “Hearing about Hulk Hogan’s passing hits deep — feels like a piece of my childhood is gone. The bandana, the flex, the leg drop, the larger-than-life energy… he was the superhero for so many of us. Rest easy brother.”

According to an obituary in the *Los Angeles Times*, Bollea was the Make-A-Wish Foundation’s “most requested personality” in 1992 and “visited as many as 20 sick children a week.” He also had “hundreds” of official Hulk Hogan products—from action-figures to vitamins—and was a celebrity spokesperson in commercials for cereals, deodorants, and more.

Bollea’s popularity extended beyond the wrestling ring, especially as he expanded into other ventures, including acting.

“I had the pleasure of meeting this brilliant personality and showman when he was 26 years old,” Sylvester Stallone posted on Instagram alongside an image of Bollea’s appearance in the 1982 boxing film *Rocky III*. Stallone said his “heart breaks” at the news of Bollea’s passing, describing Bollea as having been “absolutely wonderful” and whose “amazing skill” made the film “incredibly special.”



Throughout the ’90s, Bollea starred in low-budget films such as holiday comedy *Santa With Muscles* and action flick *The Ultimate Weapon*. He also starred as a crime-fighting former Navy SEAL in the one-season series *Thunder in Paradise* and made appearances, often as himself, in a number of TV shows, including *Suddenly Susan*, a sitcom starring Brooke Shields.

“Rest easy, Hulk,” Shields posted on Instagram alongside a photo of her armwrestling Bollea on set in 1999. “This moment and his entire guest episode,” Shields wrote, “was a true highlight. Sending love to all of his loved ones today.”

From 2005 to 2009, VH1 aired the reality show *Hogan Knows Best* followed by its spinoff *Brooke Knows Best* that followed the lives of Bollea, his first wife Linda, and their children Brooke and Nick.

Bollea married Linda Marie Claridge, who took the name Hogan, in 1983. Hogan filed for divorce in 2007. Bollea then married makeup artist Jennifer McDaniel, who was 20 years his junior, in 2010, though they divorced in 2021. Bollea married yoga instructor Sky Daily, who was 25 years his junior, in 2023.

Bollea's personal and professional lives were rocked in 2012, when a 2007 sex tape was leaked of him with Heather Clem, the then-wife of radio shock jock Bubba the Love Sponge Clem. Bollea and Bubba had previously been described as "best friends," and Bollea served as best man at Bubba's wedding in 2007.

Bollea sued Bubba as well as media site Gawker, which had published part of the sex tape, for invasion of privacy. His multi-million-dollar lawsuit against Gawker, which was bankrolled by tech mogul Peter Thiel and bankrupted the media company, had a profound effect on digital privacy and has been described as Bollea's "most lasting contribution to our culture."

After Bollea's death, Bubba told TMZ that he was "heartbroken" and regretful. "As everyone knows we had our issues and those issues were mostly my fault. I loved him as a friend while he was with us, and will continue to love his memory as a friend going forward," he said. "I'm saddened that I will never be able to tell

him how sorry I am for the way I handled things that created the rift between us."

In 2015, Bollea faced more sex-tape scandal, when it was revealed that in the video with Clem he could be heard repeatedly using an anti-Black racial slur and admitted to being "a little racist." Bollea apologized at the time for the "offensive language" that he said was "inconsistent with my own beliefs." Bollea said he was "disappointed" with himself, and his lawyer said he resigned from WWE, though WWE said they terminated his contract. (He returned to WWE in 2018.)

A number of Black wrestling stars defended Bollea, including Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Michael "Virgil" Jones, Laurence "Mr. T" Tureaud, and Elijah "Da Pope" Burke, who cited Bollea's decadeslong "positive mark on humanity."

After Bollea's death, Burke posted on X: "I'll never forget being able to share the ring with someone who helped shaped my childhood."

"Trump-a-mania"

"Nobody's even asked me my opinion until now," Bollea told late-night host Jimmy Kimmel in 2008. "If I had to step out and say who I really believe in," he said, "I would say Obama."

"He's the choice. He seems like the real deal," Bollea said. Liberal media site HuffPost even created a fake political ad touting the endorsement.

But Bollea's love for Barack Obama wouldn't last. In 2011, he told Fox News that he was disappointed with the President. "I was a big Obama supporter and kinda, like, believed everything he said he was gonna do," Bollea said, before lamenting that "nothing's happened."

Bollea added that he was also “a little upset that he didn’t ask me permission to use my music,” after Obama made his entrance at the White House Correspondents’ Dinner earlier that year to Bollea’s wrestling theme song “Real American.” Bollea joked that he himself would make a great President and went on to endorse Mitt Romney in 2012.

In 2015, Bollea retweeted a post that said “Bi-racial President Obama uses N word, is applauded and keeps his job. @HulkHogan uses N word, is vilified and loses his job” to his more than 1 million followers on the social media platform. Later that year, he said he would like to be Trump’s running mate.

Bollea cited his decadeslong ties with Trump, when he gave what Trump would call “an absolutely electric speech” at the Republican National Convention in 2024.

“As an entertainer, I try to stay out of politics,” Bollea said from the stage in Milwaukee. “I can no longer stay silent. I’m here tonight because I want the world to know that Donald Trump is a real American hero, and I’m proud to support my hero as the next President of this United States.”

Bollea ripped off his shirt, his signature move, to reveal a red Trump-Vance tank top beneath and told the crowd: “Let Trump-a-mania run wild, brother! Let Trump-a-mania rule again! Let Trump-a-mania, Make America Great Again!”

“Hulk Hogan was a great American icon,” Vice President J.D. Vance posted on X after Bollea’s death. “One of the first people I ever truly admired as a kid. The last time I saw him we promised we’d get beers together next time we saw each other. The next time will have to be on the other side, my friend! Rest in peace.”

Other Republicans including House Speaker Mike Johnson and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis also offered tributes. Johnson called Bollea “a giant in stature and in life.” DeSantis said he was “a major icon” and a “Floridian through and through.”

Conservative activist and political commentator Charlie Kirk described Bollea as “a genuine, uniquely American creation. Fearlessly original. Flawed but unbowed. He had the courage to stand on his own principles, and he never stopped fighting for his country.”

Bollea outlined those principles at the height of Hulkamania in what he called his “Demandments”: train, say your prayers, and eat your vitamins. Later, he added a fourth: believe in yourself.

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Ozzy Osbourne, Black Sabbath Singer and Heavy Metal Icon, Dies at 76

Lee is a reporter at TIME. She covers U.S. news with a focus on health and reproductive rights.

Ozzy Osbourne, the lead singer of the British rock band Black Sabbath, died Tuesday at the age of 76.

“It is with more sadness than mere words can convey that we have to report that our beloved Ozzy Osbourne has passed away this morning,” his family said in a statement posted on X. “He was with his family and surrounded by love. We ask everyone to respect our family privacy at this time.”

Osbourne, who publicly shared his diagnosis with Parkinson’s disease in 2020, played a farewell show just a few weeks ago.

Osbourne has been credited with helping invent heavy metal with Black Sabbath. He later went on to star in the hit MTV reality show, “The Osbournes,” which first aired in 2002 and focused on his life with his wife and two of their children (Osbourne and his

wife have another child, Aimee, who opted out of participating in the show).

Black Sabbath, dubbed “the Beatles of heavy metal” by Dave Navarro of the band Jane’s Addiction in 2010, released its self-titled debut album in 1970. The band fired Osbourne in 1979, citing instances of him turning up to rehearsals late and missing performances. But Osbourne continued performing as a solo artist, releasing 13 of his own albums. He earned the nickname “Prince of Darkness.”

Osbourne built a reputation for outlandish behavior; in one memorable instance, he bit the head off of a bat that a fan had tossed onto the stage while he was performing in 1981.

He reunited with Black Sabbath in 2013, when the band released its final studio album, “13.”

Osbourne was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame with Black Sabbath in 2006 and as a solo artist in 2024.

The band reunited on stage just weeks before Osbourne’s death for a farewell show. Bands ranging from Metallica to Guns N Roses performed as well, and video tributes were featured from artists including Dolly Parton and Elton John. Actor Jason Momoa, a heavy metal fan, hosted the event.

The band’s official account on the social media platform X posted a photo of Osbourne with the caption “Ozzy Forever!” following news of the singer’s death. Metallica also paid tribute to Osbourne on Tuesday, sharing a photo of the late musician with a broken heart emoji in the caption.

John posted a tribute to Osbourne on Instagram as well, offering his condolences to the late musician’s family.

“So sad to hear the news of @ozzyosbourne passing away,” John said. “He was a dear friend and a huge trailblazer who secured his place in the pantheon of rock gods – a true legend. He was also one of the funniest people I’ve ever met. I will miss him dearly.”

Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones shared a photo of Osbourne on X, saying he was “so very sad” to hear the news and praising the “lovely goodbye concert” Osbourne had done.

Singer Rod Stewart said in an Instagram post, “Bye, bye, Ozzy. Sleep well, my friend. I’ll see you up there—later rather than sooner.”

Gene Simmons of the rock band Kiss also expressed his condolences on social media, writing on X that Osbourne “was a giant. Admired and loved by millions of fans worldwide.”

Rapper Ice-T paid tribute to Osbourne as well, as did Flavor Flav, who said in a post on X that he was “real heart broken” over Osbourne’s passing and that “it was a real honor to watch him get inducted into the @rockhall last year.”

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https://time.com/7304618

The World’s Richest Woman Has Opened a Medical School

Park is a senior health correspondent at TIME. She covers the COVID-19 pandemic, new drug developments in cancer and Alzheimer’s disease, mental health, HIV, CRISPR, and advances in gene therapy, among other issues in health and science. She also covers the Olympics and co-chaired TIME’s inaugural TIME 100 Health Summit in 2019. Her work has won awards from the New York Press Club and recognition from the Deadline Club. In addition, she is the author of *The Stem Cell Hope: How Stem Cell Medicine Can Change Our Lives*. Follow her on Instagram at @aliceparktime.

On July 14, 48 students walked through the doors of the Alice L. Walton School of Medicine in Bentonville, Ark. to become its inaugural class.

Some came from neighboring cities, others from urban centers in Michigan and New York. Almost all had a choice in where they

could become doctors but took a chance on the new school because of its unique approach to rethinking medical education.

Named after its founder—the world's richest woman and an heir to the Walmart fortune—the school will train students over the next four years in a radically different way from the method most traditional medical schools use. And that's the point.

Instead of drilling young physicians to chase symptom after symptom and perform test after test, Alice Walton wants her school's graduates to keep patients healthy by practicing something that most doctors today don't prioritize: preventive medicine and whole-health principles, which involve caring for (and not just treating) the entire person and all of the factors—from their mental health to their living conditions and lifestyle choices—that contribute to wellbeing.

Those aren't new ideas, of course, but traditional medicine has only paid lip service to them. Experts have noted that while as much as 80% of medical education focuses on biology, about 60% of premature deaths are due to behavioral factors including lifestyle habits like diet, exercise, and smoking. "I applied to 34 schools, and nowhere else are they doing this," says Ellie Andrew-Vaughn, who arrived in Bentonville from Ann Arbor, Mich.

"I heard whispers about the school back in December 2021," says Rebecca Wilson, who grew up in nearby Cave Springs and plans to remain in Arkansas to improve the health care there. "Hearing how revolutionary their outlook on medicine was, and how it was a part of the DNA and not something adapted to the curriculum like some of the other schools—that was unique."

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Visually, the school lives up to its acronym: AWSOM. The building, with soaring glass walls, is located on Walton family property and includes not just a wellness studio and gym, but a rooftop park, healing gardens where students can study, growing gardens for producing healthy foods, and a reflection pond. A path from the rooftop park leads through the Ozark forest directly to the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, which Walton built in 2011, as a reminder to the students about the link between healing, art, science, and humanity.

Walton is covering tuition for the first five graduating classes. For her investment, Walton anticipates that some of the newly minted doctors will bring what they learn to the local community—specifically to underserved areas in Arkansas, Walton's home state. But her grander vision is for the model she creates to be mirrored at other medical schools across the country—so that what started in northwest Arkansas can spread to other regions with few health resources.

Creating a new medical school in 2025 isn't an easy or obvious project, especially when the mission is to redesign medical education. "My brother Jim said, 'Oh, that's a big undertaking, Alice.' I think my big brother was trying to protect me from myself," she says with a smile.

But Walton's firsthand experience as a patient set her on this path. After a serious car accident in the 1980s, she battled a bone infection, multiple surgeries, and lingering health issues for more than a decade. Walton grew convinced that "our health care system is broken" and that someone needed to catalyze change.

A broken system

Medicine in the U.S. has long incentivized doctors to respond to people's symptoms—by ordering many rounds of tests and procedures, to name two cost-driving examples—rather than trying to prevent them in the first place. The doctor-patient conversations that should be at the heart of effective medical care are rare today, and patients are saddled with exorbitant fees that haven't always contributed to better health outcomes. The system also contributes to care deserts in rural America. Arkansas, in particular, ranks 48th out of the 50 states in the share of adults in fair or poor health. The state also has the highest maternal death and teen birth rates in the U.S.

Where do you start if you want to recreate health care from scratch? There isn't a single solution, and any strategy needs to account for not just how doctors are trained and practice medicine, but also the financial incentives that currently drive those practices. In 2019, Walton founded the Heartland Whole Health Institute, located steps from the new medical school, which focuses on research, health advocacy, and education about the policies and financial systems necessary to advance preventive care. With

AWSOM, she is turning her attention to finding a better way to train the people who will populate that system: future doctors.

“They will get all the science and disease knowledge they need to manage the ‘sick-care’ side of things,” Walton says. But “I wanted to create a school that really gives doctors the ability to focus on how to keep their patients healthy.”

That includes integrating emerging technologies like AI and digital health innovations that can help people track and manage health conditions like diabetes, obesity, and blood pressure. “We are in a huge transition point right now in terms of technology,” she says. “I’m really excited about the potential.”

An art-infused curriculum

Her vision for an innovative curriculum at the medical school began taking shape after a meeting with Dr. Lloyd Minor, dean of the Stanford School of Medicine and a fellow Arkansan, who became AWSOM’s chair of the board of directors. (AWSOM also has a formal collaboration with Stanford, in which half a dozen of the university’s faculty will teach incoming students and mentor both students and faculty.)

To helm the school, Walton chose Dr. Sharmila Makhija, a gynecologic cancer surgeon from Alabama who shared Walton’s commitment to whole-health principles and improving the quality of health care in the South.

“The foundation [of the curriculum] is traditional medicine but enhanced with the humanities and the arts to improve the delivery of care—so we improve on how we [act] with patients and how we partner with patients,” says Makhija.

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Walton's personal passion for art informed and infused the new school's humanities-based approach. Introduced to watercolors by her mother, she made her first art purchase—a print of Picasso's *Blue Nude*—as a child from her father's Walton's 5 & 10 in Bentonville. As an adult, she collected key pieces of American art spanning five centuries, then founded the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville to share what is now a collection of more than 3,500 pieces with the community, for free. "Art was a foreign thing here," she says. "Museums weren't a part of our life." But when the museum opened in 2011, it resonated, becoming a center for social events.

Crystal Bridges and AWSOM are physically attached for a reason. An integral part of the medical school curriculum involves exposure to and appreciation for the lessons that healers can learn from art. "In the time I was going in and out of hospitals, I had to grab whatever I could find to keep my sanity," Walton says of how painting watercolors and reading art books helped in her recovery. "I do believe the art world and the health care world need to collide more, and both will benefit from it."

All students will take a course, for example, that involves drawing one another and studying pieces in the museum. The hope is to sharpen their skills of observation and empathy. "It sounds basic, but you start to talk about, 'What did it feel like to observe someone closely, or how did it feel to be seen?'" says Makhija. "It's not a usual way in the medical world to think and talk, so it's a different language, but that's part of the goal: to help them understand different modes of speaking, understanding, and relating to others."

On a wintry January day, Walton walks through the museum's installation and stops at one of her favorites: a gigantic depiction of the opening words of the U.S. Constitution, "We the People." The original calligraphy is recreated with thousands of shoelaces in different colors and fabrics.

On the opposite wall, Walton chose to place an array of portraits of "who we are as people," she says, ranging from one of George Washington painted by Charles Willson Peale in the early 1780s to a digital installation featuring a fracking worker from North Dakota—"two of my boyfriends George and Johnny," as Walton describes them. The series also includes the first known portrait of an American, painted in Colonial times, and a portrait of a Black woman painted after the Ferguson riots. "We don't only go by time periods," she says of the way the pieces in the museum are displayed. "Some of the fun is putting George and Johnny together."

The installation spans pieces from all time periods, all races, and all walks of life—a theme she infuses in the medical school as well. "Health care is the most inequitable," she says. "A lot of that is because we don't have doctors and health-care providers who look

like a lot of people. It is a big issue, and it is a huge piece of the problem in why people don't get health care."

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Walton believes that every piece should be displayed and enjoyed by the public, not tucked away in storage. So in 2017, she created the Art Bridges program, a collaboration with more than 250 smaller museums around the country that essentially extends the available wall space for pieces by rotating works constantly.

That same focus on putting the community first infuses the training that the new medical students receive so that they never lose sight of why they became physicians: to serve the patients that need them the most. To reiterate their broader role in society as healers, all of the new students started community service work on their third day on campus. "We expect the students, the faculty, everybody to be of service to the community," says Makhija. "Wherever they go to work, they've got to understand who they are serving."

Doctors of the future

About 2,000 students applied to the school's 48 spots, and many who were chosen share an interest in bringing health care to underserved regions, particularly Arkansas. One is Emily Bunch, who grew up in Little Rock and was drawn to the school's focus on nutrition education, which traditional medical schools tend to gloss over. While the medical school accreditation organization recommends that curriculums devote at least 25 hours of instruction to nutrition, most schools average about 20 hours, in some cases only as electives. AWSOM's curriculum currently includes more than 50 hours of nutrition-related training, including culinary classes.

Doctors-to-be will spend class time gardening and at a teaching farm, learning about the seasonality of fresh foods and how to cook them—then passing those lessons onto patients. "There is a lack of understanding of nutrition and so much exposure to fast food," Bunch says of her own struggles with weight and finding healthy food options growing up. "It wasn't until a doctor talked to me about nutrition in a whole-health way that I understood the mental and psychological aspects of weight, and that empowered me to finally take control of my health."

"It's a big problem in Arkansas and a big part of the reason I wanted to become a doctor—to serve as a guide for other people," Bunch says. "Arkansas desperately needs more whole-health and preventive care."

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As part of their training, students will also have the opportunity to design parts of their curriculum through research projects and community service. The hope is that these will lead to novel ways of delivering care and improving health outcomes, especially for communities that current health care services don't reach.

Safwan Sarker, from Brooklyn, is eager to find ways to improve home-based care by integrating high-tech tools like virtual reality and augmented reality for underserved populations. “There aren’t enough people researching these [strategies],” he says. “So people dismiss them. But AWSOM is encouraging us to look at new systems and new ways to help populations like those in rural communities. If they aren’t getting their medications on time, would a drone-based system work? Once we get the evidence-based framework for these novel methods, they could lead the way in terms of bridging gaps.”

Both Walton and Makhija know their graduates will face challenges in bringing what they learn in the classroom to the real world. “We can have whatever curriculum we want, but if they are thrown out in an environment where they are not practicing whole health, then it’s for naught,” says Walton. The new graduates must be part of the solution to change that, she believes. AWSOM partnered with the local health system, Mercy, which will not only provide clinical exposure to the doctors-in-training but also implement some of the whole-patient approaches the school is hoping to introduce, including initially with a cardiac care center.

There are signs this approach has appeal beyond the heartland. Already, Makhija says a few health systems have contacted her about AWSOM's whole-health focus, and Walton hopes the school will serve as a model of a new type of medical education. "It's all about rethinking and re-envisioning what the education of the next generation of health care workers will be like," says Makhija. "Alice and I are very keen on creating a sustainable model of education, both in how we deliver the curriculum that can be replicated, as well as fiscally, so that other schools can use a similar model."

If successful, AWSOM could prove that medical school should, and can, be about more than just biology and anatomy. It can also be about what drives a person, and what feeds them—literally, figuratively, spiritually. Walton is delighted to watch the future of health care take root in the places where she played as a child, especially since the area desperately needs better health solutions. "It's going to be really exciting and fun to see what happens," she says.

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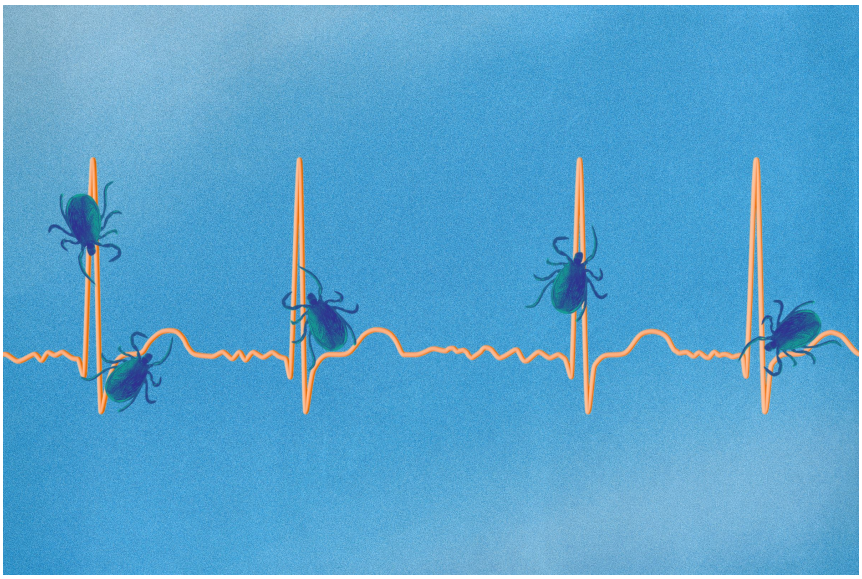
https://time.com/7303692

7 Surprising Symptoms of Lyme Disease

Haupt is a health and wellness editor at TIME. She covers happiness and actionable ways to live well.



Nearly 500,000 people are diagnosed with Lyme disease each year in the U.S. For about 75% of them, the first sign will be a skin lesion that appears one to four weeks after being bitten by an infected deer tick. But it might not look how you'd imagine: Only 20% of these lesions take on the classic bull's-eye appearance commonly associated with Lyme.

Other early symptoms of Lyme disease mimic what you might experience with the flu: a fever, chills, muscle aches, and swollen lymph nodes. Within the first five to 10 days of Lyme disease infection, most people will only experience these relatively ordinary symptoms. If they're promptly diagnosed with and treated for Lyme—which generally means two to three weeks of the antibiotic doxycycline—the story often ends there.

But for up to 10% of people, most of whom aren't diagnosed or treated promptly, the disease triggers lingering, serious symptoms.

Researchers aren't sure exactly what causes chronic Lyme disease, but speculate it could be the result of factors like persistent bacteria or genetic predispositions. When someone has it, "there's almost nothing it can't do," says Dr. Amy Edwards, an assistant professor of pediatrics at the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine who specializes in infectious diseases. The complex symptoms often stump doctors, but "once it's caught you off guard a few times, you're kind of looking for it everywhere. Every time someone comes in with weird symptoms in the summer, you're like, 'Could it be Lyme disease?'"

Here's a look at some of the surprising symptoms that Lyme disease can cause, especially as it progresses.

Heart problems

When Lyme isn't treated effectively early on, it can end up impacting the cardiac, neurologic, and rheumatologic systems, says Dr. Amy Duckro, an infectious disease specialist with Kaiser Permanente in Colorado. In 1 out of every 100 patients, for example, Lyme bacteria enters the heart tissues, which is called Lyme carditis. This kind of heart inflammation can lead to light-headedness, fainting, shortness of breath, heart palpitations, or chest pain.

Read More: *The Best and Worst Way to Remove a Tick*

In some cases, people develop atrioventricular block, which is a blockage that prevents electrical signals from moving from the upper to the lower chambers of the heart. When the blockage gets particularly bad, patients often need a temporary pacemaker paired with IV antibiotics, says Dr. Sunjya K. Schweig, who's on the scientific advisory board of the Bay Area Lyme Foundation, a non-profit that aims to accelerate medical breakthroughs for Lyme disease. He wants people to be aware that this can happen, and to take symptoms like new heart palpitations seriously. "It's treatable,

it’s curable, and it can also kill you if it’s not caught,” he says. “It’s a really big deal.”

Brain fog

It took Kirsten Stein more than two years—and 15 doctor’s appointments—to be diagnosed with Lyme disease. During that time, she struggled with an array of mental and physical symptoms. The most alarming was the brain fog and short-term memory loss that clouded her every day: She recalls running into a close friend, for example, and not being able to summon the names of the woman’s kids, despite seeing them multiple times a week. “I remember thinking, ‘That’s not good,’” she says. During a conversation with her husband, she couldn’t conjure the word “glass” and started pointing at things; while playing a game with friends, she excused herself to the restroom because she couldn’t think clearly enough to participate. Another time, she dropped her son off at school—and five minutes later, asked her daughter where he was. “It was terrifying,” she says.

Read More: *Long Dismissed, Chronic Lyme Disease Is Finally Getting Its Moment*

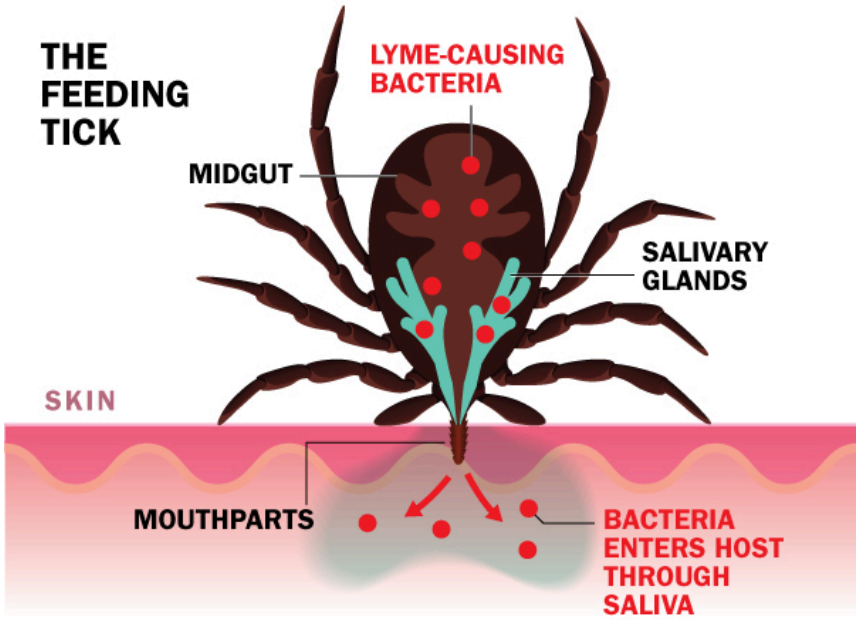
Many patients report similar experiences with brain fog, Schweig says. It’s likely caused by Lyme-induced inflammation in the central nervous system. “We see a huge amount of brain effects: difficulty focusing, difficulty thinking, difficulty reading and absorbing information,” he says. “It can be extremely disruptive to people’s lives, because they can’t function. They can’t go about their normal learning and working and paying attention and doing projects and following through with their tasks.”

Bell’s palsy

There are 12 nerves—called the cranial nerves—that originate in the brain and play an important role in sense and movement for different parts of the head, face, neck, and torso. Lyme disease can affect those nerves, triggering Bell’s palsy, which causes sudden weakness or paralysis on one side of the face. It’s especially common in adults, she says, and typically appears several weeks to months after infection.

How to remove a tick

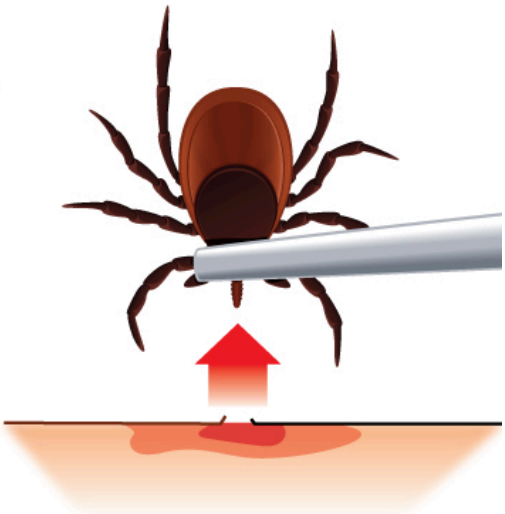
Ticks can spread a range of diseases, most notably Lyme. Here's how they do it—and how to protect yourself



WHAT TO DO

1 Using fine-tipped tweezers, grab the tick as close to the skin as possible. Pull upward with steady pressure

2 Once the tick is out, dispose of it and clean the bite site with soap and water or rubbing alcohol



TIME

Eye problems

In the early stages of Lyme disease, people sometimes experience eye irritation and conjunctivitis. As the condition progresses, “you can get cranial nerve inflammation or infections, and this can cause double vision called diplopia,” Schweig says. Research suggests Lyme can cause sudden vision loss, damage to the optic nerve, and neurotrophic keratitis (decreased corneal sensation). It’s also possible to experience blurry vision, eye floaters, tearing, extreme sensitivity to light, and inflammation of the retina.

Hearing problems

The inflammation that Lyme causes can affect the inner ear, leading to a variety of symptoms, including hearing loss and tinnitus, or ringing in the ears, Schweig says. Ear issues can also trigger dizziness and balance problems.

Read More: *Scientists Have Identified the Lyme Disease Genes Responsible for Severe Symptoms*

In one study that included 216 people with a tickborne disease, 162 experienced otolaryngological symptoms—making them a “frequent manifestation,” according to the study authors. The most common complaint was tinnitus (77% of participants), followed by vertigo and dizziness (54%), a headache (39%), and unilateral sensorineural hearing loss, or hearing loss in one ear (17%).

Arthritis

One of the most common symptoms of Lyme that Edwards sees in young people is arthritis. It often happens the same way: Kids show up in the emergency room in the late fall with a big, swollen knee and, perhaps, a low-grade fever. Sometimes they also have a limp

or are unable to put weight on their leg. “It’s actually not crazy painful—it hurts, but it’s not debilitating,” she says. “Everybody’s like, ‘Did you injure it?’” But it turns out they’re experiencing arthritis caused by a tick bite they might not have even been aware of during the summer. “It’s actually the most common way that Lyme presents in children,” Edwards says. Kids typically get better once they start a four-week regimen of doxycycline. The problem, she adds, is that not all clinicians make the connection, which can delay diagnosis and proper treatment.

Debilitating fatigue

Research suggests that Lyme disease can cause persistent fatigue, even when it’s diagnosed and treated early. In one study, participants with a history of Lyme were 8 to 15 times more likely to report moderate or severe fatigue than those who had never had the disease.

That resonates with Caitlin Durcan, 27, who developed Lyme disease after being bitten by a tick while working at a summer camp in upstate New York. She experienced a range of symptoms—migraines, puberty-like emotional instability, brain fog, puffy eyes—for months before finding a doctor who prescribed an aggressive treatment regimen that has mostly alleviated her symptoms. At the time, Durcan was in college, and one of the worst manifestations of the disease was overwhelming fatigue. “I was very sluggish and tired all the time,” she recalls. “I’d go to class, I’d come home, and I’d sleep for three hours. I’d wake up, I’d go to my classes, and I’d come back home and sleep. I couldn’t stay awake for a day, and my friends were just like, ‘Clearly something is really wrong.’”

Durcan—who never developed more traditional symptoms like a rash or fever—says her experience recovering from Lyme changed her entire perspective on life. She was so relieved to feel like

herself again that she started venturing outside her comfort zone, seizing social opportunities and signing up for her first-ever half marathon. She urges other people struggling with Lyme-related symptoms to continue advocating for themselves. “It’s a really tricky, weird illness, and it presents itself so differently in everyone” she says. “Finding a doctor who believes you and understands that what you’re telling them is the truth, and who wants to help you, is huge.”

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https://time.com/7295491

I Used to Hate the Beach. Here's What Changed My Mind

Litt is a former senior speechwriter for President Barack Obama. His latest book is It's Only Drowning: A True Story of Learning to Surf and the Search for Common Ground.

You're either a mountain person or you're a beach person. At least, that's what I used to think. The two groups aren't just distinct but opposite, the Sharks vs. Jets of outdoor recreation, each side dance-snapping at the other in rhythmic distrust.

There was never any question which gang I belonged to. Growing up, my family skied. We hiked. While no one would ever have described us as "mountaineers," our vacations nearly always involved verticality.

What really made us mountain people, though, is that we *weren't* beach people. On its face, what set us apart was elevation, but

really the divide ran much deeper. In the mountains, you pick a point and work hard to get there. If you're hiking or climbing, the goal is above you. If you're skiing, snowboarding, or mountain biking, the goal is below. Either way, in the mountains, a sense of satisfaction and wonder comes through hard work and achievement. You earn your views.

Beach people, on the other hand… well, to be honest, I didn't really get beach people. I understood beach *activities*: boogey-boarding, bodysurfing, fishing. But just hanging out on the sand, sitting on a rickety chair in the shade of a flimsy umbrella, with nothing but a book or human being for company? That didn't seem merely strange to me. It seemed scary. The Jewish Talmud refers to sleep as 1/60th of death. That's more or less how I felt about hanging out at the beach.

And so, as fate would have it, I fell in love with a beach person.

The coastal Maria to my alpine Tony was Jacqui, a Jersey girl who grew up ten minutes from the shore. We were 25-years-old when we met on OkCupid in its 2011 heyday. She was still in law school at the time. I was a junior speechwriter in the White House. While sleeping in her childhood twin bed was not entirely inviting, the prospect of free weekend getaways was too good to pass up. We made a few trips each summer.

"What should we do?" I'd ask in the morning.

"Go to the beach," Jacqui would reply.

"Okay, but what should we *do* at the beach," I'd ask.

Jacqui would give me a confused look, as though I'd asked what we should do while wrestling alligators or piloting fighter jets through a hail of enemy gunfire. For "to go" was the only beach-related verb needed.

Read More:* *What Surfing Taught Me About Having Fun in a World That's on Fire

It's hard to believe that there was a time when I thought that a "beach day" was the same thing as "a day spent at the beach." The latter is a description. The former, I now know, is a ritual. The details are unique to each beachgoer, yet the experience being summoned is the same.

For my then-girlfriend, now wife, it began at Wegman's, the grocery store that plays the kind of communal role in Central New Jersey that cathedrals once did in Medieval Europe. There, like a witch carefully selecting spell ingredients, she'd pick out provisions. Turkey sandwich with provolone and spicy mustard. Ruffles potato chips. Sparkling water. Blueberries. (Jacqui eats other kinds of berries, of course, but never at the beach.) We'd throw our haul in the cooler, set out in search of a parking spot, and haul our chairs toward the sand.

It's hard to describe how antsy I felt in the absence of a concrete, mountain-person goal. *We're letting entire hours fly by!* I'd think.

I can't point to the exact moment when I began to feel kind of beachy. But in a way, that's the point. A beach day isn't about discrete moments—it's about time melting into itself like provolone cheese on a turkey sandwich. It's one of the few instances when "Where did the time go?" can be asked with delight rather than regret.

That's especially true in America. In a country that fetishizes productivity, the beach celebrates the absence of achievement. It gives a quiet, content middle finger to our nation's workaholism. In its own laid-back and lackadaisical way, beachgoers argue that life's most valuable reward isn't a yacht or private jet or invitation to hobnob with the rich and powerful. It's extra time—and the chance to spend it with people you care about. In a country in the

grip of rampant and growing income inequality, that's a remarkably egalitarian view of luxury.

For most Americans, the beach is also the country's most accessible public land. Many of America's most pristine woodlands or peaks are deep in the wilderness. That's part of what makes them pristine. The beach is different—and far more densely populated. While coastal counties make up less than 10% of the lower 48 states' landmass, they're home to 40% of its people. For many American families, sun and sand are the most affordable nature around.

And in our often privatized and commodified country, American beaches today remain surprisingly accessible. There are ongoing fights about the dwindling number of public beaches, and reasons to be concerned the number will shrink. But for now, in both law and theory, the beach belongs to everyone.

Nor has beach access devolved into yet another red versus blue issue. California and Texas like to present themselves as polar opposite visions for America. But one thing they have in common is that the public has a legal right to access the beach.

Read More: How I Learned to Love My Body—Especially in the Summer

That's one reason why—while the fantasy of a private beach remains the prevailing one in beer commercials or posts from travel influencers—in real life the beach is increasingly a melting pot. Nationalists like Stephen Miller suggest that when people from different backgrounds share the same space, the inevitable result is chaos. The beach belies that. That's especially easy to see here in New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the country, and one of its most diverse. When people from vastly different groups hang out on the beach, what happens is pretty simple: they enjoy themselves. That's not because they're trying to prove a point about

multiculturalism. It’s because, if you’re not enjoying yourself on the beach, who even are you?

The beach isn’t perfect. If someone ran for president on the single-issue platform of “No blasting music from giant Bluetooth speakers on the sand without your fellow beachgoers’ consent,” they’d have my vote. But while I still love to ski and hike and earn my views, I’ve realized that sharks and jets exist in closer symbiosis than I once thought. We don’t have to divide ourselves into mountain people and beach people. We need both. And if we’re lucky, we get to be both.

One night, almost a decade ago, Jacqui and I went to Long Branch, New Jersey on July 4th. We staked out a spot on the jam-packed sand and laid out our blankets. There were at least a half-dozen languages being spoken, but no translation was needed. We sat together, chatting in anticipation of the fireworks, enjoying a quintessentially American experience.

After the last boom echoed over the shoreline, everyone went their separate ways. But not immediately. There was a moment when all of us—thousands of us—lingered and listened to the ocean. We sat there on the edge of the infinite, each of us knowing that, for a moment, anyway, we had all the time in the world.

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https://time.com/7305580

Why Trump’s Threats Won’t Alter Putin’s Course in Ukraine

Ian Bremmer is a foreign affairs columnist and editor-at-large at TIME. He is the president of Eurasia Group, a political-risk consultancy, and GZERO Media, a company dedicated to providing intelligent and engaging coverage of international affairs. He teaches applied geopolitics at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, and his most recent book is The Power of Crisis.

On Monday, President Donald Trump signaled growing impatience with Vladimir Putin by telling reporters in Scotland that Russia’s president must halt the fighting in Ukraine within “10 or 12 days” to avoid sanctions and secondary tariffs, tightening a 50-day deadline he set earlier this month. But this latest threat is unlikely to change Putin’s plans.

Judged from the outside, it’s hard to see why the war continues. Putin, the one person who could bring it to an end, can see that Russia has paid a steep price over the past three years and five months to gain just 20% of Ukraine’s land. By some estimates,

Russia has suffered more than one million battlefield casualties, with a quarter million killed. The war has strengthened NATO, which Putin says is Russia's true enemy, by bringing in new members and persuading European governments to spend much more on defense. Since the invasion, roughly one million young Russians have fled the country to avoid conscription, find better job prospects, or both.

Though scaling up Russia's war machine briefly boosted its economy, the long-term loss of energy customers in Europe, a surge of inflation that has pushed interest rates to historic highs, and a deepening reluctance among Russian consumers to spend leaves Russia's economic future on dangerous ground. How hard would it be, outsiders wonder, for Putin to cut a deal, stop the bleeding, declare victory, and consolidate Russia's gains?

But Putin believes time is still on his side. In the coming months, Russian forces will probably gain enough new ground in Ukraine's east to keep him committed to a strategy of maximum pressure to wear away at Ukrainian resolve. Drone and missile strikes on Ukrainian cities and infrastructure will continue because Kyiv hasn't found a way to stop them. Russian forces will apply more pressure in other regions to further thin Ukraine's defenses. That's enough to persuade Russia's president to stay in the game.

Not that Volodymyr Zelensky is ready to offer concessions. Ukraine's president is weakened domestically by a failed attempt by his government to leash a corruption watchdog that had begun growling at his political allies. Even if he were stronger, Ukrainians have absorbed much too much Kremlin-inflicted pain to offer concessions substantial enough to satisfy a Russian president who will likely want more. Nor will Ukrainians trust Putin and future Russian leaders to honor the promises they make to end the current fighting.

Trump doesn’t have the leverage to change any of this. There isn’t enough direct trade flow between the U.S. and Russia to credibly threaten, but he has warned of possible tariffs on countries that trade with Russia. Yet, Putin has good reason to doubt that Trump will pick new fights with China and India, now Russia’s two biggest energy customers, particularly as Trump works to lock down big trade deals with both countries. EU sanctions won’t alter Putin’s calculus. The main tool in Europe’s 18th sanctions package against Russia, an adjustable oil price cap, will force Russian oil exporters to rely more heavily on the shadow fleet of tankers they’ve used to evade the cap. But without U.S. support, their impact won’t amount to much, and the EU has little ability to slow Russia’s defense sector.

Nor is Trump’s ability to pressure Zelensky as potent as it appeared just weeks ago, because the ever-changing, seemingly contradictory tactical approaches to both Ukraine and Russia suggest the U.S. president might again change his mind. Putin and Zelensky are also aware that Trump has many more demands on his attention at the moment.

There’s one other possible reason Putin might prolong this increasingly costly war of attrition. Perhaps his confidence in continuing the war is one more item on a lengthening list of his strategic mistakes. The invasion itself was a spectacular miscalculation of both Russian and Ukrainian strength.

Perhaps he’s not making a deal because he still can’t see how much Russia has to lose.

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https://time.com/7306519

Becoming a Bodybuilder at 50 Showed Me That Women Were Never Meant to be Thin

Anne Marie Chaker is a journalist, professional bodybuilder, and author of *LIFT: How Women Can Reclaim Their Physical Power and Transform Their Lives*

This summer I'll step onstage to compete as a professional athlete for the first time—at 50. I'll wear a fuchsia bikini small enough to fit in a Ziplock bag, pose and flex in clear heels, and strike a smile while my muscles glisten under layers of spray tan.

I'm a bodybuilder. This is my third season competing, but my first as a pro.

I came to the sport six years ago, after a string of losses—the death of my father, the end of my marriage, and a spiral into depression and alcohol. A spontaneous conversation with a woman in a hotel gym set me on a different path. Soon, I found a coach—a retired bodybuilder in Bowie, Md., named Tina Peratino—who flipped everything I thought I knew about fitness, food, and the female ideal: First, women should eat more (and better) food. Second,

carbs won’t make you fat. And above all, lifting heavy won’t make you bulky—it will make you powerful.

Read More: *Why Weight Training Is Ridiculously Good For You*

I had spent decades chasing thinness—eating less, running more, and trying to shrink. But in my new orbit of athletes, powerlifters, and bodybuilders who embraced the “moreness” of muscle, I began to want something different.

Lifting heavy and eating more—not less—reshaped not just my body but my mind. I stopped craving alcohol. I spoke up more at work. I stood taller. I even made a dating profile—and met my partner.

The shift— better food, heavy weights, little to no cardio—was so transformative, both physically and mentally, that the journalist in me had to dig deeper. I spent four years researching the science and history of women’s bodies, the overlooked power of muscle, and why the real answer to better health, longevity, and quality of life lies in building—not shrinking—ourselves. What I found revealed that muscular strength is a vital, long-overlooked key to women’s health and longevity. We’ve been taught to disappear, but our true power lies in taking up space.

Women were never meant to be thin

When anthropology professor Alison Murray was studying prehistoric human remains at the University of Cambridge, she made a startling discovery about women’s bodies: They were buff. When comparing prehistoric women to modern ones, Murray found their bone structure most closely resembled that of today’s elite rowers—evidence of regular, load-bearing activity and a sign that women played a major role in the development of agriculture.

In fact, for most of human history, women weren't meant to be thin; they were meant to be strong. Neolithic women had arm bones 11 to 16% stronger than the rowers to 30% greater than typical Cambridge students, according to a 2017 study. Bronze Age women showed a similar pattern, with arm bones up to 13% stronger than rowers. Our cultural obsession with thinness is a relatively recent invention, born of fashion, patriarchy, and postwar consumerism. When food became more accessible, especially in Western cultures, thinness replaced fullness as a marker of status and self-discipline. It began in the late 19th century, with new warnings about 'corpulence,' the dawn of dieting as a moral virtue, and the invention and rise of the calorie, all of which paved the way for modern food restriction.

Women are built to last

Today, the conversation around longevity—especially among men—is booming. But despite the manosphere's headline-grabbing blood swaps, women quietly hold the real advantage when it comes to living longer. Across time and cultures, women have consistently outlived men by 5 to 20%, says Steven Austad, scientific director of the American Federation for Aging Research. The global life expectancy at birth for a woman is 76 compared with 71 for a man. About three-fourths of centenarians are women.

The reasons aren't fully understood—theories include the possibility of a more responsive immune system, an additional X chromosome or the idea that mothering makes women robust—but the pattern is clear.

And when it comes to strength, women possess a different kind of power. Yes, men typically have more upper-body muscle and larger hearts. But studies show women are often more resilient. Sandra Hunter, chair of movement science in the School of Kinesiology at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor has found that women can

better withstand muscle fatigue. In fact, Hunter points to a 2016 review of more than 55 fatigue studies that concluded that, on average, women outlasted men by 36%.

The emerging science paints a clearer picture: women are not the weaker sex. We're just built differently—and to last.

The cultural swing back to skinny

Bursts of the "return to skinny" have always surfaced at pivotal moments — right when women are on the brink of claiming more power. It's no coincidence. The flapper look took hold in the 1920s just as women won the right to vote — a new, boyish silhouette for a new kind of woman, one who was suddenly politically powerful. In the 1960s, Twiggy's thin, androgynous frame became the face of fashion right as the women's liberation movement was gaining traction, challenging traditional roles and demanding equality. In the 1990s, heroin chic surged in popularity as women flooded law schools, boardrooms, and newsrooms in record numbers — a visual counterpunch to female ambition.

And now, at a moment when women are redefining aging, owning their midlife, and fighting urgently for reproductive autonomy, the rise of GLP-1 weight-loss drugs feels eerily familiar. Each wave of skinny fixation has echoed like a cultural recoil — a shrinking aesthetic that emerges just as women expand their influence

But something is shifting. This time, resistance is coming from midlife women—especially those in menopause—who are rejecting the idea that their power fades with age. Halle Berry has publicly shared that she was misdiagnosed with herpes when she was going through menopause–an experience that formed the basis for her new company to educate women. Midi Health CEO Joanna Strober founded her company to serve women navigating midlife hormonal transitions—like the one she was going through—and whose symptoms had long been dismissed. The menopause

industry, fueled by a range of supplements and other products, is now estimated to be worth over $17 billion.

Gyms are taking notice. Crunch Fitness, with over 400 locations nationwide and a membership that's 55% women, is cutting its supply of cardio machines in half to make room for free weights. CEO Jim Rowley believes young people following 'gymfluencers' instead of supermodels are leading the way. "Today's young women 18-to-34 are strong and social," he said in a recent interview. "'Skinny' is not where it's at.'

Life Time Inc., a chain of upscale health clubs, reports a one-third reduction in cardio equipment in favor of weights and resistance machines. Orangetheory Fitness, whose members are three-fourths women, has introduced strength-only classes alongside its signature cardio and strength blends. Peloton, too, has launched *Strength+*, a standalone app untethered from its iconic cardio machines.

Peloton instructor Tunde Oyeneyin, who recently debuted a four-week "Upper Body with Tunde" program, believes more women are embracing strength as an act of reclamation. She used to hide her muscular arms, she says. Now, women admire them.

And when she catches herself envying a thinner woman at the gym, she says she reminds herself of what she can do—throwing a heavy weight overhead."And I'll say, 'But can she do that?'"

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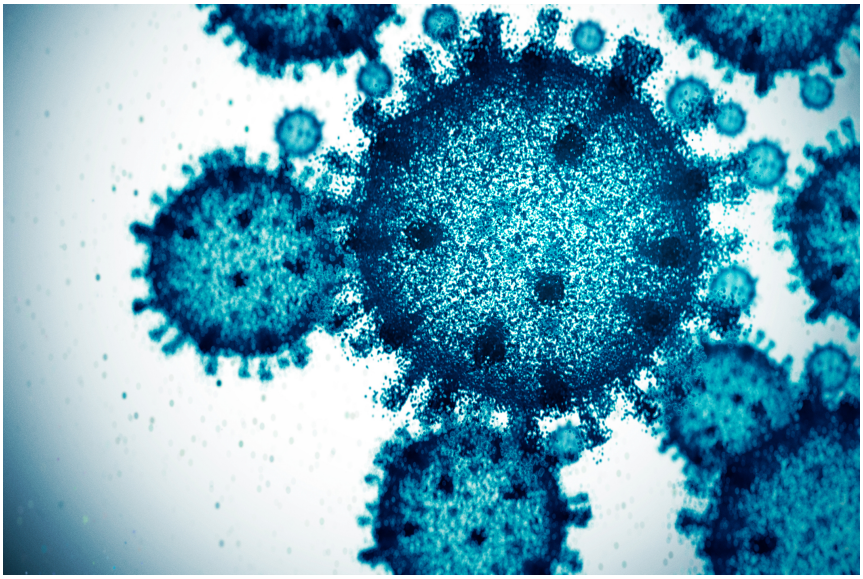
https://time.com/7293999

COVID-19 Made Our Brains Age Faster

Park is a senior health correspondent at TIME. She covers the COVID-19 pandemic, new drug developments in cancer and Alzheimer's disease, mental health, HIV, CRISPR, and advances in gene therapy, among other issues in health and science. She also covers the Olympics and co-chaired TIME's inaugural TIME 100 Health Summit in 2019. Her work has won awards from the New York Press Club and recognition from the Deadline Club. In addition, she is the author of *The Stem Cell Hope: How Stem Cell Medicine Can Change Our Lives*. Follow her on Instagram at @aliceparktime.



COVID-19 is leaving all kinds of legacies on our health, both on our bodies and our brains. In a study published July 22 in *Nature Communications*, researchers report that living through the pandemic aged our brains—whether or not you were infected with COVID-19.

To investigate COVID-19's impact on the brain, researchers looked at brain scans from 1,000 people during and before the pandemic.

They compared these to brain scans from other people taken during “normal” times as a model for typical brain aging.

Led by Ali-Reza Mohammadi-Nejad from the University of Nottingham School of Medicine in the U.K., the researchers looked at measures like brain function, gray and white matter volume, a person’s cognitive skills, and their chronological age. Gray matter is critical for memory, emotions, and movement, while white matter is essential for helping nerves transmit electrical signals.

The pandemic-era brains aged about 5.5 months faster compared to the brains of those studied before the pandemic. The accelerated aging was documented in people who had COVID-19 infections as well as those who didn’t, which strongly suggests that pandemic-related factors other than biological or virus-driven ones—like high stress—were also at work. In fact, the changes in gray and white matter were similar in people who were and were not infected.

“This finding was interesting and rather unexpected,” says Mohammadi-Nejad. Other studies have already shown that the COVID-19 virus can change the brain for the worse, but “we found that participants who simply lived through the pandemic period, regardless of infection, also showed signs of slightly accelerated brain aging. This highlights that the broader experience of the pandemic—including disruptions to daily life, stress, reduced social interactions, reduced activity, etc.,—may have had a measurable impact on brain health.”

Read More: *What to Know About the New COVID-19 Variant XFG*

The impact of the pandemic seemed to be greater in certain groups—notably men, the elderly, and people with more compromised health, lower educational status and income, or unstable housing. People with less stable employment had an average of five months of additional brain aging compared to those with higher

employment status, while poorer health added about four months of increased brain age compared to better health.

However, only people infected with COVID-19 showed drops in cognitive skills.

But the fact that those who weren't infected during the pandemic also showed accelerated aging reflects the need to acknowledge the broader health effects of the pandemic beyond the obvious physical metrics on which doctors tend to focus. "Brain health can be influenced by everyday life activities, and major societal disruptions—like those experienced during the pandemic—can leave a mark even in healthy individuals," Mohammadi-Nejad says. "This adds to our understanding of public health by reinforcing the importance of considering mental, cognitive, and social well-being alongside traditional physical health indicators during future crisis-response planning."

While the study did not explore specific ways to address brain aging, he says that strategies known to maintain brain health, such as a healthy diet, exercise, adequate sleep, and social and cognitive interactions are important, especially in the context of stressful circumstances such as a pandemic. "Whether these can reverse the specific changes we observed remains to be studied," he says.

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https://time.com/7304417

A Joe Rogan-Blessed Democrat? James Talarico Draws Eyes of a Party Desperate For New Leaders

Elliott is a senior correspondent at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C., bureau, where he covers national campaigns, elections, and government. He also writes TIME's politics newsletter, The D.C. Brief.

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Over the weekend, a lot of institutional Washington suddenly and enthusiastically discovered James Talarico, a seminary student and member of the Texas state House. The find came during an impressive outing for the 36-year-old Democrat on Joe Rogan's podcast in which the aspiring preacher espoused the same brand of sharp sound bytes that has earned him almost a million TikTok followers. Over more than two hours, Talarico explained to Rogan why a Texas law requiring the posting of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms is "un-Christian," the coming political fights won't be about Left or Right but rather the top and the

bottom of society, and how both parties get it wrong when they treat politicians like Messianic figures.

“James Talarico, you need to run for President,” Rogan said. “We need someone who is actually a good person.”

Still, Talarico’s sudden place in the imagination of D.C.’s elites is not entirely unwarranted. He is seen as a dark-horse candidate to challenge Sen. John Cornyn’s already dicey re-election bid in Texas, where a scandal-soaked Attorney General Ken Paxton may plausibly land a Trump endorsement for his primary challenge. Paxton is ahead in polling and is better-liked among Texas’ MAGA base, but Cornyn, who’s held his seat since 2002 and is still a power center in the Upper Chamber, is seen as a stronger candidate in the general election. Their fight to the March primary is already getting ugly, as Paxton’s wife has recently filed for divorce “on biblical grounds,” which Cornyn cited to The Washington *Post* as news that “is going to tell a lot of people that there was more fire there where there was smoke.”

Talarico might have some steps between his desk in Austin and the Resolute Desk, to be sure. Few have seen an ascent that clear-cut, although Barack Obama went from the Illinois state Senate to a national ticket in a harried four years. And the excitement the Texan is drawing might say more about the anemic state of the Democratic Party than Talarico’s national prospects.

There is a deep reservoir of talent on the Democratic side in the Lone Star State, many of whom are champing at the bit to face a potentially bruised GOP nominee at the top of the 2026 ticket. Former Rep. Colin Allred, who lost a bid for Senate last year against incumbent Ted Cruz, said he is racing next year for the seat against Cornyn. Rep. Joaquin Castro, too, is in the mix for the race. And former Rep. Beto O’Rourke on Sunday said he was undecided on running for the Democratic nomination himself; he unsuccessfully ran for Senator in 2018, President in 2020, and

Governor in 2022. “I’m very optimistic about Democrats’ opportunity in 2026,” O’Rourke said on CNN’s “State of the Union.”

Still, let’s zoom out for a minute. For close to two decades, we’ve been just one election away from Texas turning blue. The last time a Democrat won statewide in Texas was 1994—a year before Windows 95 hit the market. Texas is in a record dry spell, and there’s no point pretending otherwise.

O’Rourke is high-water mark in recent memory, and he captured 48% of the vote in his 2018 campaign. He raised $80 million and impressed even those of us who went to Texas that October with plans to slag him. And, to his credit, Cornyn is a far less divisive figure than O’Rourke’s rival in 2018, Sen. Ted Cruz.

To *his* credit, Talarico sounds a whole lot different than the partisan Democrats or Republicans here in Washington.

“I think we need to start listening to Democrats who are in red and purple areas. There is something about living in a red state that makes you different from a national Democrat who lives in a blue city on the coast. I think we learn how to talk with people outside of our party in a more effective way, because it’s a matter of political survival out here,” Talarico told Rogan. “I can’t pass anything in the Texas Legislature without getting Republican support, so I’ve had to find ways to build relationships and build bridges across partisan divides as a Texas Democrat.”

Keep in mind, he is making these comments as national Democrats are weighing their own post-2024 reckoning. According to reporting over the weekend from The New York *Times*, their autopsy of the Joe Biden-turned-Kamala Harris Democratic ticket last year will avoid any real accounting for Biden’s decision to run or any real choices Harris made. Instead, the focus of the still-being-written report is on outside allied groups’ choices, a move

that kind of avoids the point and spares the party and real accountability.

Talarico might be able to put some distance between himself and national Democrats without too much effort. His studies of theology are not natural fits in the secular Democratic identity of late. His fluency on digital platforms may mesh neatly with a relatively younger cohort of Democrats who finally seem to be meeting voters where they are on social platforms while the Old Guard clings to a playbook from the 1990s rooted in buying television ads and postcards. And Talarico is so far outside the splash zone of partisan Washington that he might just be able to stand unstained by the ugliness of this town.

Still, that so many Democrats spent the weekend obsessing over a relatively unknown figure in Austin, who represents about 200,000 people in a deep-blue district, shows the extent of their desperation. They failed to stop Trump's hugely unpopular tax- and spending-cuts package. They are heading into an August recess with an unhappy base and little to show for a completely shut-out-of-power reality. The midterms should be ripe for Democratic gains but the party has no one at the helm calling the shots. And there won't be a viable leader until Democrats pick a presidential nominee for 2028. Given the uncertainty drifting toward that moment, Talarico is just as plausible as anyone—blessed by a podcaster who helped Trump win the White House and the manosphere last year. It's long odds, but Democrats don't exactly have a guide to firmer ground in the offing.

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https://time.com/7304119

Is ‘Sweatshop Data’ Really Over?

Perrigo is a correspondent at TIME, based in the London bureau. He covers the tech industry, focusing on the companies reshaping our world in strange and unexpected ways. His investigation ‘Inside Facebook’s African Sweatshop’ was a finalist for the 2022 Orwell Prize.

Welcome back to *In the Loop*, TIME’s new twice-weekly newsletter about the world of AI.

If you’re reading this in your browser, you can subscribe to have the next one delivered straight to your inbox.

What to Know: The future of ‘sweatshop data’

You can measure time in the world of AI by the cadence of new essays with provocative titles. Another one arrived earlier this month from the team at Mechanize Work: a new startup that is trying to, er, automate all human labor. Its title? “Sweatshop data is over.”

This one caught my attention. As regular readers may know, I've done a lot of reporting over the years on the origins of the data that is used to train AI systems. My story "Inside Facebook's African Sweatshop" was the first to reveal how Meta used contractors in Kenya, some earning as little as $1.50 per hour, to remove content from their platforms—content that would later be used in attempts to train AI systems to do that job automatically. I also broke the news that OpenAI used workers from the same outsourcing company to detoxify ChatGPT. In both cases, workers said the labor left them with diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder. So if sweatshop data really is a thing of the past, that would be a very big deal indeed.

What the essay argues — Mechanize Work's essay points to a very real trend in AI research. To summarize: AI systems used to be relatively unintelligent. To teach them the difference between, say, a cat and a dog, you'd need to give them lots of different labeled examples of cats and dogs. The most cost-effective way to get those labels was from the Global South, where labor is cheap. But as AI systems have gotten smarter, they no longer need to be told basic information, the authors argue. AI companies are now desperately seeking *expert data*, which necessarily comes from people with PhDs—and who won't put up with poverty wages. "Teaching AIs these new capabilities will require the dedicated efforts of high-skill specialists working full-time, not low-skill contractors working at scale," the authors argue.

A new AI paradigm — The authors are, in one important sense, correct. The big money has indeed moved toward expert data. A clutch of companies, including Mechanize Work, are jostling to be the ones to dominate the space, which could eventually be worth hundreds of billions of dollars, according to insiders. Many of them aren't just hiring experts, but are also building dedicated software environments to help AI learn from experience at scale, in a paradigm known as *reinforcement learning with verifiable rewards*. It takes inspiration from DeepMind's 2017 model AlphaZero,

which didn't need to observe humans playing chess or Go, and instead became superhuman just by playing against itself millions of times. In the same vein, these companies are trying to build software that would allow AI to "self-play," with the help of experts, on questions of coding, science, and math. If they can get that to work, it could potentially unlock major new leaps in capability, top researchers believe.

There's just one problem — While all of this is true, it does not mean that sweatshop data has gone away. "We don't observe the workforce of data workers, in the classical sense, decreasing," says Milagros Miceli, a researcher at the Weizenbaum Institute in Berlin who studies so-called sweatshop data. "Quite the opposite."

Meta and TikTok, for example, still rely on thousands of contractors all over the world to remove harmful content from their systems—a task that has stubbornly resisted full AI automation. Other types of low-paid tasks, typically carried out in places like Kenya, the Philippines, and India, are booming.

"Right now what we are seeing is a lot of what we call algorithmic verification: people checking in on existing AI models to ensure that they are functioning according to plan," Miceli says. "The funny thing is, it's the same workers. If you talk to people, they will tell you: I have done content moderation. I have done data labeling. Now I am doing this."

Who to Know: Shengjia Zhao, Chief Scientist, Meta Superintelligence Labs

Mark Zuckerberg promoted AI researcher Shengjia Zhao to chief scientist of the new effort inside Meta to create "superintelligence." Zhao joined Meta last month from OpenAI, where he worked on the o1-mini and o3-mini models.

Zuck's memo — In a note to staff on Saturday, Zuckerberg wrote: "Shengjia has already pioneered several breakthroughs including a new scaling paradigm and distinguished himself as a leader in the field." Zhao, who studied for his undergraduate degree in Beijing and graduated from Stanford with a PhD in 2022, "will set the research agenda and scientific direction for our new lab," Zuckerberg wrote.

Meta's recruiting push — Zuckerberg has ignited a fierce war for talent in the AI industry by offering top AI researchers pay packages worth up to $300 million, according to reports. "I've lost track of how many people from here they've tried to get," Sam Altman told OpenAI staff in a Slack message, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Bad news for LeCun — Zhao's promotion is yet another sign that Yann LeCun—who until the hiring blitz this year was Meta's most senior AI scientist—has been put out to pasture. A notable critic of the idea that LLMs will scale to superintelligence, LeCun's views appear to be increasingly at odds with Zuckerberg's bullishness. Meta's Superintelligence team is clearly now a higher priority for Zuckerberg than the separate group LeCun runs, called Facebook AI Research (FAIR). In a note appended to his announcement of Zhao's promotion on Threads, Zuckerberg denied that LeCun had been sidelined. "To avoid any confusion, there's no change in Yann's role," he wrote. "He will continue to be Chief Scientist for FAIR."

AI in Action

One of the big ways AI is already affecting our world is in the changes it's bringing to our information ecosystem. News publishers have long complained that Google's "AI Overviews" in its search results have reduced traffic, and therefore revenues, harming their ability to employ journalists and hold the powerful to

account. Now we have new data from the Pew Research Center that puts that complaint into stark relief.

When AI summaries are included in search results, only 8% of users click through to a link — down from 15% without an AI summary, the study found. Just 1% of users clicked on any link *in* that AI summary itself, rubbishing the argument that AI summaries are an effective way of sending users toward publishers' content.

As always, if you have an interesting story of AI in Action, we'd love to hear it. Email us at: intheloop@time.com

What We're Reading

"How to Save OpenAI's Nonprofit Soul, According to a Former OpenAI Employee," by Jacob Hilton in TIME

Jacob Hilton, who worked at OpenAI between 2018 and 2023, writes about the ongoing battle over OpenAI's legal structure—and what it might mean for the future of our world.

"The nonprofit still has no independent staff of its own, and its board members are too busy running their own companies or academic labs to provide meaningful oversight," he argues. "To add to this, OpenAI's proposed restructuring now threatens to weaken the board's authority when it instead needs reinforcing."

We Can Stop Gazans From Dying of Starvation Right Now. Here's How We Do It

David Miliband is the President and CEO of the International Rescue Committee. He oversees the agency's operations in over 40 crisis-effect countries and its refugee resettlement and assistance programs. Prior to joining IRC, he served as the 74th Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, representing the United Kingdom throughout the world.

Today, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)—the global gold standard initiative charged with assessing hunger and food insecurity—released a devastating but predictable analysis: famine, the worst case scenario humanitarian actors have been warning about for the past 21 months, is unfolding in Gaza.

According to the IPC, a body which prides itself on technical expertise and is not given to hyperbole, two of the three thresholds required to classify famine in Gaza have been surpassed. Food consumption and acute malnutrition, particularly in northern Gaza and Gaza City, have reached catastrophic levels. The third threshold, mortality from starvation and related causes, remains

unverified. This is not because people are not dying. This is because the conditions on the ground—lack of humanitarian access, raging conflict, and the collapse of the health system—make data collection very hard.

The choice is deadly and clear. Why wait for a post-mortem when we can save these lives now?

The IPC analysis is not a warning. It is a photograph, together with those of the emaciated children that have shocked the world. I have heard it myself from International Rescue Committee (IRC) staff on the ground in Gaza. We must believe our eyes and ears: this is not a theoretical risk. It is a lived reality and it is happening now. The government of Israel's restrictions on aid have created the conditions for famine—and the window to prevent mass death is rapidly closing.

This famine is a man-made catastrophe. It is not a consequence of natural scarcity, but of political choices. And historical precedent paints a stark picture of the cost of inaction. In Somalia in 2011, famine was only officially declared after more than 250,000 people had already died, half of them children under five. Despite months of warnings and worsening drought, the global response surged only after the declaration—and long after it could save the most vulnerable. It was the single most fatal food crisis of the 21st century. The risk before us is history repeating itself.

At the IRC, we are already seeing the consequences of inaction. One in five children in Gaza City is now acutely malnourished. Our Palestinian partners and IRC staff are delivering nutrition, child protection, health and hygiene support under relentless pressure—and often without food or electricity themselves. I have heard from staff who stretch one meal across an entire day. They tell us of children too weak to walk, and of emaciated people collapsing in the street.

The IRC knows all too well what severe acute malnutrition does to children's bodies. It destroys immunity, making common illnesses like diarrhea or pneumonia lethal. It halts brain development, impairs physical growth, and leaves lifelong consequences. A child suffering from Severe Acute Malnutrition is 12 times more likely to die from disease than a well-nourished child. Even those who survive will bear the scars of this crisis for decades.

Despite the overwhelming evidence of rampant malnutrition and growing deaths from starvation, Gaza remains all but sealed off. At the IRC, we have several tons of life-saving medical supplies ready and waiting to enter—enough to treat thousands and bolster a health system that is collapsing under the weight of war and deprivation. These supplies sit idle. Hospitals are either destroyed or overwhelmed. Fuel is scarce. Food prices have surged by 700%. Gaza's essential services have collapsed.

Instead of opening land routes, the international community has turned to airdrops and maritime routes, stopgaps that, while well-intentioned, are no substitute for safe, sustained access. Airdrops are inefficient, limited in scale, dangerous, incapable of delivering the specialized food and medical care required to save malnourished children. Land routes are not only the most efficient option, they are the only realistic option at the scale and speed this crisis demands. The IRC knows this from experience. In every major food crisis we've responded to—from Ethiopia to South Sudan—it is timely, coordinated and unimpeded access that makes the difference between life and death.

The solution is tragically simple. First, open all viable land crossings—not for hours and not with caveats, but at scale, with fast screening and consistency, to flood Gaza with aid immediately. We know that in the ceasefire months of January and February this year, the flow of humanitarian and commercial goods made a difference immediately. Second, ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian organizations to reach children and their families—

from Rafah to northern Gaza. Third, the political track still matters. A ceasefire remains vital. Without an end to hostilities, no humanitarian corridor can function safely, Palestinian civilians cannot be reached at scale and the hostages will not return home.

This is not a crisis that demands more data. It demands more determination, not from those struggling to survive, but from national and international leadership that needs to speak out against the blockade that is driving people to more death. The world knows what is happening in Gaza. The cost of delay will be measured in the lives of children lost. It is too late for too many, but not for all. The choice is ours and the time is now.

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https://time.com/7306344

The Malnutrition Crisis in Gaza Will Outlive the War, Experts Warn

Wright is an Editorial Producer for TIME.

Babies are supposed to grow. But for the last eight of his 20 months of life, Enas Alwaheidi's toddler son, Taim, has remained at the same weight: 9 kilograms, or just short of 20 pounds.

"We don't have enough flour, so every day we make three pieces of bread," Alwaheidi tells TIME from Sheikh Redwan near Gaza City. "My husband eats one, and I eat half so that my son can eat one and a half pieces throughout the day."

But their already meager food supply is dwindling. "Taim goes to sleep hungry," she says. "He still doesn't have enough milk."

With hunger-related deaths in Gaza on the rise, international pressure is mounting on Israel to ease restrictions and allow greater flows of aid. On Tuesday, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), an assessment system used by global humanitarian agencies, reported that famine thresholds had been

reached in nearly the entire enclave. The agency found that half a million people—one in five residents—are living in famine-like conditions.

Read more: *Journalists In Gaza Are Documenting Their Own Starvation*

A generation at risk

Experts caution, however, that even if aid arrives in time to avert mass death from starvation, an entire generation will be permanently affected as a result of being deprived of enough food.

According to data from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), one in five children under the age of five in Gaza City is now malnourished. In May alone, more than 5,000 children were diagnosed with malnutrition. Since January, an average of 112 children per day have been admitted into clinics across the Gaza Strip for treatment.

The long-term effects of malnutrition include stunted growth, impaired cognitive development, and weakened immune systems. These impacts are particularly devastating during the first three years of life—a critical developmental window in which the central nervous system and brain are still forming, according to Zero to Three, a U.S.-based non-profit organization focused on the healthy development of babies and toddlers. Severe malnutrition during this period can result in lifelong deficits, according to a 2021 study in Acta Biomedica, even if nutrition improves later. Stunting, which affects both physical and cognitive development, becomes irreversible after age two.

Medical experts warn that chronic malnutrition is permanently damaging the health of children across Gaza. The developing brain requires adequate nutrition to form proper neural connections, and prolonged malnutrition during infancy and early childhood can

result in reduced IQ, learning disabilities, and behavioral problems that persist through life.

The immune systems of malnourished children remain compromised, making them more susceptible to infectious diseases. “All of [the children] have a terrible diet,” says Alwaheidi. “We’re trying to prevent them from getting sick.”

Gaza’s Ministry of Health recorded that 89 children have died from malnutrition effects since October 2023. Zainab Abu Haleeb, a 5-month-old, passed away on July 26 at Nasser Hospital weighing 4 pounds—less than what she weighed when she was born.

In the absence of independent monitoring on the ground, the ministry is the primary source for casualty data relied upon by humanitarian groups, journalists, and international bodies. Its figures cannot be independently verified by TIME.

Complications to pregnancy

Malnutrition in childhood can also have consequences in adulthood—especially for women. Experts note that those who experienced chronic malnutrition early in life face a higher risk of

complications during pregnancy and childbirth. That risk is now acute, where up to 20% of Gaza's estimated 55,000 pregnant women are malnourished, according to the United Nations Population Fund, or UNFPA. Each missed meal increases the likelihood of miscarriage, stillbirth, and undernourished newborns.

While the human body tends to prioritize breast milk production even in times of moderate hunger, the extreme deprivation in Gaza has pushed many women beyond this physiological threshold, according to Andee Clark Vaughan, an emergency nurse with the Palestinian Australian New Zealand Medical Association (PANZMA) based in Gaza. Alwaheidi said she considers herself "lucky" to be able to feed her child every day, but even so, "it's not enough."

Public health collapse

The crisis is compounded by the destruction of Gaza's infrastructure. As of June 2025, over 90% of homes in Gaza and 94% of hospitals have been damaged or destroyed, according to the International Rescue Committee and the World Health Organization. In such conditions, even the delivery of food cannot prevent outbreaks of disease. Without clean water or functioning sewage systems, cholera, diarrhea, and severe dehydration pose grave risks.

"These [crises] work in tandem," Scott Paul, Oxfam America's Director of Peace and Security, told TIME. The U.K.-based aid agency and its partners provide clean water and mental health support to civilians on the ground. But Paul said that such efforts are not enough to meet the scale of need. "The first instinct is [to] send food when food is needed," he says. "But what's needed just as much are therapeutic feeding programs and full-scale medical interventions."

International pressure mounts on Israel to allow in more aid

Israel halted most aid flows in March following the collapse of a cease-fire. Officials in the Israeli government deny that famine conditions exist in Gaza, calling such claims a “false campaign promoted by Hamas.” But facing mounting global outrage, the Israeli military recently announced a daily 10-hour pause in operations in certain parts of the territory to permit aid delivery.

Citing concerns that Hamas was diverting humanitarian aid, Israel replaced the existing aid system with one of its own, operated by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a group backed by Israel and the United States. Four distribution points have been established under the new system. But since their creation, more than 1,000 Palestinians have been killed at or near the sites, according to local officials. Aid organizations have called the sites both dangerous and insufficient.

The World Food Programme estimates that Gaza requires 62,000 tons of food each month to meet basic needs. While more than 116,000 metric tons of food aid are currently prepositioned at regional corridors, access remains limited.

“This is humanitarian theater when there are real humanitarian solutions available,” said Paul of Oxfam, urging Israel to reopen land crossings for large-scale aid convoys. “It’s been safe. It’s been effective. It’s been scaled. And there’s no reason that can’t happen tomorrow.”

Steve Cutts, interim chief executive of Medical Aid for Palestinians, said that the current aid airdrops are no substitute for organized land deliveries. “Dropping aid from the sky cannot meet the colossal needs of 2.3 million people,” he told TIME, “or replace

the safe, coordinated aid delivery that only open land crossings can provide.”

For Enas Alwaheidi, every day is a struggle to ensure her son is fed and to try and ignore her own crippling hunger, which causes daily headaches, dizziness and exhaustion.

“[We] do not feel that we have any energy at all,” she says. “We try to distract ourselves with anything to get the day over with.”

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https://time.com/7306512

The Rise of Green Wall Street

Worland is a senior correspondent at TIME, based in the Washington, D.C., bureau. He received Covering Climate Now's inaugural Climate Journalist of the Year award in 2022, among other awards. He is the Outrider Foundation fellow at TIME.

The Great Hall in the City of London's Guildhall might seem like an odd place to anchor a climate summit. At a time when leading climate thinkers are increasingly calling for systemic change, it screams tradition. Built in 1411, the medieval auditorium is a homage to age-old British institutions and customs with stained glass windows honoring lord mayors and monarchs. The dissonance is only amplified by its surroundings: a square mile housing the world's leading financial institutions, gleaming towers of banks and investment firms with proprietors historically far more focused on adding up their financial returns than on calculating progress toward net-zero emissions. And yet Guildhall—and the City, as the financial district is known—were the center of the action in June when 45,000 climate advocates from around the world descended on London for its annual "Climate Action Week." To participate, attendees hopped between meetings at Guildhall, the London Stock Exchange, and the myriad banks, insurers, and other financial institutions found in the area.

The location was no coincidence. To tackle climate change will require moving immense sums of money—and the institutions located in the City of London have money to lend and invest. But the decision wasn't entirely, or even primarily, altruistic. Positioning London as the key node in the world of sustainable finance could pay off big as the sector continues to grow. A boom in jobs and wealth will be bestowed wherever banks and financial institutions focused on this issue set up shop. Estimates on the size of the opportunity vary depending on methodology, but most research suggests that by the 2030s the value of sustainable finance will reach double-digit trillions.

"What we've got here is an economic growth story of the 21st century," says Alok Sharma, the former British Cabinet minister who served as president of the 2021 U.N. climate conference in Glasgow. "This isn't just about climate."

Sharma, whose soft-spoken disposition belies his convening power in the climate space, is now charged with the important task of wrangling the financial sector, government, and industry to chart a path forward for the country as the chair of the Transition Finance Council. The council, launched by the British government and the City of London, is working through how to leverage the city's deep capital markets and history of financial innovation to make the city—and the country—the world's green-finance leader. "We have a financial ecosystem in London which very few markets can actually rival," he notes.

London has succeeded in taking pole position, but it's far from the only place that's caught on. Across the globe, financial hubs—largely in Europe and Asia—have launched efforts to attract the growing sustainable-finance industry. Leaning into their global connections and deep capital markets, Abu Dhabi and Singapore have emerged as leading contenders giving London a run for its money. In many ways, the effort in these three cities—and around the world—is collaborative. Growth in the sector will lift all boats.

But it’s also fiercely competitive. The city—or cities—that win will not only bring jobs and wealth but also give victors outsize influence shaping the future of both the global financial system and the fight against climate change.

Walking through the City of London today can feel a bit like tracing the history of global finance. The modern Bank of England, a cornerstone of the country’s financial might, sits only a short stroll from its original 1694 location. The age-old cemeteries sprinkled between today’s glass office buildings serve as the final resting place for some of London’s original financiers. And, in some cases, even the odd-sounding street names tie back to the city’s financial roots: Lombard Street, named for the Italian region known for its bankers and merchants, or Ironmonger Lane, which once housed the metal-trading houses.

At its core, London’s sustainable-finance opportunity is part and parcel with this history. In today’s parlance, innovation tends to refer to technological innovation, but many of the biggest breakthroughs to emerge from London over the centuries were financial—from the launch of the world’s first joint-stock companies in the 16th century, which pioneered risk sharing among investors and created some of the world’s first tradable securities, to pioneering of the modern insurance market in the 17th century by Lloyd’s of London.

In short, over some 500 years, British financiers built the foundations of today’s global financial system. Now, these foundations need some climate-minded reinvention—and at lightning speed. The International Energy Agency estimates that investment in clean energy must reach $4.5 trillion annually in the 2030s to meet climate goals. To get that money to the Global South, where it is most needed, will require new financial structures that make investing less risky.

In some corners of the globe, most importantly the U.S., the push to tweak the rules of the road has been met with soft denial. The federal government has halted efforts to think through the financial disclosure of climate risk and exited cooperative efforts with other countries aimed at greening the financial system. In London, leaders in both government and in the private sector are jumping on the opportunity. “Britain is open for business,” says Sharma. “We are a very established market, but you can’t sort of sit there and rest on your laurels.”

Even for a close watcher of the climate-finance space, it can be difficult to keep track of everything coming out of London. Under both of the country’s major parties in recent years, the British government has launched a flurry of efforts to help its financial-services industry lead the global sustainable-finance movement. The Financial Conduct Authority has worked on greenwashing regulations and the standards for applying a sustainable label to products. The Green Finance Institute was created in 2019 to coordinate public-private efforts. In 2021, the Treasury launched green-bonds sales to demonstrate government commitment to the sector. And, last year, the current government created a national wealth fund to invest in a range of low-carbon technologies—attracting private finance in the process.

Since launching earlier this year, Sharma’s Transition Finance Council has quickly become an essential node. The group focuses specifically on transition finance, the branch of sustainable finance where money is invested not only to build clean technologies but also to decarbonize big sources of emissions. Think of lending to an oil company to fix leaks in its pipes to stop methane from seeping out, or putting up the money for a steel producer to convert to a less emissions-intensive process. In other mainstream approaches, green technology or ESG-related investing that tries to identify and protect against environmental risks is prioritized. In -transition finance, you can run to the problem and spend money

trying to fix it—even if that means financing a dirty industry for a short while.

In some jurisdictions, transition finance is a thorny subject because it means dealing with polluting industries. But it's a big opportunity—both for the financial sector and the planet. The World Economic Forum estimates that transition finance for carbon-heavy sectors including aviation, shipping, and steel production represents a $13.5 trillion opportunity in the coming decades. These so-called hard-to-abate sectors make up 40% of global emissions today.

The Transition Finance Council sounds wonky—and it is. The body of government officials, investors, and top executives in industry and finance was formed to work through the technicalities of key issues hand in hand with the private sector. One subcommittee tackles "credibility and integrity," another works on "pathways, policies, and governance." The Transition Finance Market Review report released last year ahead of the group's launch explores how firms navigate "credible third-party standards" and "carbon budget delivery plans." Splashy public-facing marketing campaign this is not. And yet, this is the sort of work needed to give firms the confidence to set up their transition-finance shop in London.

Vanessa Havard-Williams, who founded the ESG practice at global law firm Linklaters, led the report and described the work as an aggressive consultation effort across the public and private sectors and in countries around the world. The council is currently crafting "credibility guidelines" at a firm level for transition finance with an eye to launching a global consultation process just ahead of this year's U.N. climate conference in Brazil, she says.

Despite all of this, many climate advocates have complained that much of the British regulatory regime is moving more slowly than across the Channel in the E.U. But that's part of the plan. Over the past decade, the E.U. laid out a suite of regulations that the financial industry has complained is too onerous. The U.K., which has the freedom to chart its own rules after officially leaving the E.U. in 2020, has tried to take advantage of that dynamic with less complex rule-making. "I'm not a Brexiteer, but I do think Europe constrained our abilities," says Chris Hayward, policy chairman of the City of London. "On green finance, I think we're free to flex our wings."

The complicated history of colonialism offers another advantage. No matter the dark legacies, Britain walked away with relationships with emerging markets and developing countries. The London Stock Exchange hosts more international companies than any other major bourse, with a strong roster of listed firms from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Commonwealth countries, the network of former colonies that still maintain a loose alliance, still use London as a primary listing venue for their largest companies, and British banks and asset managers have extensive operations across these markets. Not too long ago, London promoters might

have said “the sun doesn’t set on the British Empire” to indicate the scope of British influence. Today, as Sharma puts it more delicately, “we’re in a very good time zone.”

More than 3,000 miles away, Abu Dhabi has its own global network, forged through its position selling vast quantities of oil to the rest of the world. For that very reason, a cynical climate advocate might look at the city’s push into sustainable finance with deep skepticism. Drive across the capital of the United Arab Emirates, and you’ll see nonstop reminders that this is oil-and-gas country—from the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company logo affixed on prominent skyscrapers to the network of fossil-fuel infrastructure just off the coastline.

But also prominently fixed in the city’s skyline are the sleek buildings that host the money managers overseeing more than $1 trillion in capital. The funds may have come from selling oil to the world, but leaders in the Emirates know that sooner or later they will need to diversify—and attracting sustainable finance is a key part of their agenda. From a corner office at Al Maryah Tower, in the heart of Abu Dhabi’s posh international business district, Majid Al Suwaidi runs a $30 billion climate fund known as Alterra. Financed with money from the Emirati government, the fund is designed to make return-oriented investments that will have meaningful climate impact. Opportunities in the Global South receive particular attention.

When it was announced in 2023, experts working at the intersection of finance and climate hailed its approach as unique. Alterra describes itself as a “fund of funds,” meaning that it takes a broad strategic view while relying on other fund managers to do the on-the-ground investing. And, with its size and influential backing, Alterra works with other co-investors to scale up the impact. The goal is to use the UAE’s contribution to mobilize a total of $250 billion. “In a way, we achieved what we set out to do, which

is to prove that there was an appetite and interest for people to invest in the Global South," says Al Suwaidi.

The UAE plans to earn a healthy return on its $30 billion investment, but the opportunity is really much bigger. Alterra is the center of an emerging business cluster, much like venture capital in Silicon Valley or the entertainment industry in Hollywood. By tapping into the business of financing climate infrastructure in the Global South early, the country is placing a down payment for capturing a much bigger opportunity. Emerging markets represent the largest source of emissions reduction or prevention. And that means, sooner or later, significant capital must flow to make it happen.

"The ecosystem is building here," Al Suwaidi told me from his office, explaining that the Alterra fund has helped attract smaller climate-focused fund managers. Today, Abu Dhabi Global Market (ADGM), the city's financial free zone where regulation is based on English common law, counts more than 170 local funds and other institutions that say they are focused on sustainability. Indeed, ADGM, Abu Dhabi's Wall Street, has created an entire system to put wind in the sails of these efforts. The organization has crafted a comprehensive sustainable-finance regulatory framework that includes environmental standards for funds, portfolios, bonds, stocks, and other financial instruments linked to the environment. ESG disclosure standards are clear and simple. "We've been busy," says Lawrence Paramasivam, who oversees the sustainability work at the Financial Services Regulatory Authority at ADGM. Paramasivam describes the regulatory approach as "part of a broader diversification strategy" for ADGM. The global reach and sway of the government in the UAE has helped open doors. The country is a bridge between north and south, east and west, with friendly relations with virtually every country. It follows that it can help navigate those financial flows too.

It’s hard to find an economic-growth story as revered as Singapore’s. The country transformed from a low-income nation into a financial powerhouse in just a few generations, driven in large part by deliberate investments and a thoughtful approach to economic policymaking. Today, Singapore is placing a long-term bet on climate—and hoping that it can own the future of sustainable finance in Asia. “The timeline is not set by business cycles. It is not set by the electoral cycles,” said Ravi Menon, Singapore’s climate ambassador, at a June event in London. “The planet’s timeline will eventually impose its will on us.” And, when it does, Singapore wants to be prepared.

To fully understand Singapore’s approach would require unpacking a dizzying array of programs, international partnerships, and regulatory structures. Through the Singapore-Asia Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance, the country created a framework to rate investments on their sustainability characteristics. Critically, the program was developed with all of Asia in mind, helping advance the country’s position at the middle of the region’s flow of sustainable finance. And the government ponied up $500 million as the public-sector contribution to a finance initiative that combines public and private money to invest in climate projects in the region. That effort has attracted other funds, including from the private sector, says Menon.

A key asset for Singapore is Temasek, the country’s $300 billion state-owned investment fund. The fund’s charter includes a mandate to protect the planet, but just as important is the fund’s goal of providing long-term returns for generations to come. “If I’m going to hold assets for the long term, then I’ve got to think about what it means to be in a climate-challenged position,” said Dilhan Pillay-Sandrasegara, the CEO of Temasek, at a World Economic Forum event in January. “And so that’s what motivates us to invest in things like sustainability-focused sectors or sustainable solutions.”

One essential area of interest for Temasek has been carbon-credit companies. Today, carbon credits remain complicated and controversial. And yet most experts deep in the weeds of climate policy and finance see their growth as an inevitability because they provide one of the most effective ways to finance emissions reduction and can easily channel money from the Global North to the Global South. Temasek's investments in carbon-credit companies, combined with government policy to facilitate it, have proved critical in turning Singapore into a carbon-credit hub—certainly the most important in the region and perhaps the world. Today, the country is home to more than 100 carbon-trading firms and a robust regulatory framework for how companies can use credits.

In the spring of 2023, as the UAE was in the midst of developing Alterra and Singapore was crafting its taxonomy for Asia, the U.S. was immersed in a fight over whether fund managers can legally take climate change into account in their decisionmaking. Then and now, the mainstream U.S. conversation at the intersection of climate and finance is vastly different from the same conversations happening around the world. As other countries innovate, the U.S. government is at best caught in a defensive posture and at worst pulling back.

During the Biden years, the Federal Reserve dipped its toes into the Network for Greening the Financial System before promptly pulling out after Donald Trump's election, and the U.S. federal government has abandoned any efforts to craft financial-disclosure rules around climate. To be clear, big U.S. financial firms with operations outside the U.S. will need to comply with this growing segment of climate regulation; the rules will just be drafted somewhere else.

It may not worry Wall Street just yet. While cities like London and Singapore have developed global finance hubs, today there's no

question that the U.S. is the epicenter. The country has the deepest capital markets and the world's reserve currency. It houses the biggest and most influential global financial firms. And, yet, as sustainable finance grows, its influence has the potential to eat away at the U.S. position.

That road will be long and windy as every place faces its own unique challenges. In the U.K., politicians need to explain to voters why the government is spending so much time on sustainable finance in the midst of other challenges. Indeed, some efforts to bolster sustainable finance have stalled or been dropped entirely, presumably with those political questions in mind. In Abu Dhabi, leaders must confront the skepticism in many corners about the ability of a big oil-producing country to deliver on climate. And Singapore faces the consistent challenge that comes from existing in the shadow of China—which also has designs on developing a sustainable-finance sector. Those questions will eventually be resolved, and a new paradigm will emerge. The winners won't just capture economic opportunity; they will help determine whether the world has the financial infrastructure to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

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https://time.com/7307275

FX’s Alien: Earth Is the Best Thing to Happen to the Franchise Since Aliens

Berman is the TV critic at TIME. Along with reviewing current television, she writes about the ways in which entertainment and pop culture intersect with our larger social and political realities. Her TIME essay on *Ted Lasso* and modern masculinity won a New York Press Club award in 2022.

A spacecraft hurtling through the cosmos. An indomitable female lead. Armed crew members creeping through dim, claustrophobic hallways where death could be lurking around any corner. A hostile alien that looks like a giant, bullet-headed scorpion in fetish gear and bleeds acid the color and consistency of infected snot. That ominous drip of extraterrestrial drool.

These are the hallmarks of the *Alien* franchise, which have remained mostly consistent across the seven movies (plus two vacuous *Alien vs. Predator* crossovers) that have kept those terrifying Xenomorphs coming back to our screens every decade since the original premiered in 1979. Yet *Alien* has always been an elastic property. In 1986, James Cameron followed up Ridley

Scott's minimal work of cosmic horror with *Aliens*, an action spectacle for a maximalist era. Hero Ellen Ripley's (Sigourney Weaver) lonely fight for survival gave way to a military mission to vanquish aliens ravaging a human colony; Cameron filled the frame with cocky Marines, boxy space tanks, and an adorable orphan who finds in Ripley a surrogate mother. Both films rank among the best in their respective genres.

Subsequent features haven't been nearly as successful. In the '90s, David Fincher (*Alien 3*) and *Amélie* director Jean-Pierre Jeunet (*Alien Resurrection*), working from a script by Joss Whedon, mishandled the intellectual property. Even Scott's intriguing but convoluted 2010s origin stories and 2024's adequate *Alien: Romulus* (soon to be followed by a sequel of its own) do little to dispel the impression that the franchise's heyday ended 39 years ago.

Especially in light of this history, FX's fantastic *Alien: Earth*—a prequel to Scott's movie that is also the first live-action *Alien* series—is a remarkable achievement. But I wouldn't call it a surprise. With ambitious small-screen takes on the Coen brothers masterpiece *Fargo* and the Marvel superhero Legion under his belt, the show's creator, Noah Hawley, has built a reputation on reinvigorating hard-to-adapt IP in series fueled by profound insight into what makes a decades-old story relevant now. In the case of *Earth*, premiering Aug. 12, the subjects of artificial intelligence and corporate overreach provide more than enough fodder for cerebral sci-fi horror grounded in the anxieties of 2025.

Set in 2120, two years before Scott's *Alien*, *Earth* opens with parallel storylines. In space, the crew of the *Maginot* (whose name forebodingly references France's expensive but futile World War II Nazi defense) awakens from years of cryogenic slumber in preparation for a return to Earth. Their precious cargo, to be delivered to the franchise's canonical evil megacorp, Weyland-Yutani, is a menagerie of novel life forms, including some familiar-looking eggs. Of course, things go sideways. The creatures kill everyone except cutthroat security officer Morrow (Babou Ceesay), a cyborg. Meanwhile, on a terrestrial island called Neverland, trillionaire wunderkind Boy Kavalier (Samuel Blenkin) is using a secret technology he developed to transfer the consciousnesses of terminally ill children into synthetic, superhuman, theoretically immortal humanoid bodies. The first of these hybrids, our Ripley surrogate, christens herself Wendy (Sydney Chandler); in keeping with the Peter Pan theme, the kids she shepherds through the process will be named for Lost Boys.

These plots literally collide when the *Maginot* falls to Earth, crash-landing in a city controlled by Kavalier's upstart company, Prodigy. (Viewers who remember the '90s may have intrusive thoughts of an AOL alternative with the same name.) Along with the many casualties, the accident has geopolitical as well as business implications. In the show's timeline, the world is ruled by a tenuous alliance of five massive companies, of which Yutani and Prodigy are two. Their rivalry in the race to immortality will ultimately decide the fate of the universe. A 22nd century disrupter in the mold of Uber or Airbnb, Prodigy is all-in on hybrids. Yutani may be plundering the wildlife of far-off planets in hopes they possess the secret to eternal life.

Hawley uses this setup to reestablish the atmosphere *Alien* fans have come to expect: the tight corridors, the jump-scare attacks, the gross creatures, even the alien drool. Aesthetics have always been paramount to the franchise, particularly in Scott's movies; cybergoth artist H.R. Giger was famously instrumental in designing the look of the original, including the Xenomorph itself. *Earth* features similarly murky visuals and fearsome monsters, many original to the show. Just as eerie is its sound design, which evocatively captures, for instance, the squish of a scalpel slicing through alien flesh. Yet after a riveting first half of the premiere, too many slow-burn action and horror sequences all but arrest the development of the plot and characters until Episode 3.

But the fourth episode is a revelation. Enthralling in its setup of a war between two psychopathic corporations that doubles as a battle for control of Earth, it's also rich with insight into the peculiar interiority of Wendy and the Lost Boys—who look like adults but see the world as kids, express emotions but reside in robotic bodies physically and mentally enhanced beyond the capacity of any mortal. ("What makes them geniuses is the fact that they're children," Kavalier**,** now a young adult, theorizes. "Because children have access to a world of infinite imagination.") Are they humans, robots, or both? "We took the minds of children and put them in synthetic bodies," a scientist overseeing the project, Arthur (David Rhysdahl), frets to his wife and colleague, Dame Sylvia (Essie Davis). "If we did this wrong, we got a bunch of AIs running around thinking they're human. Worst case? We killed six kids." From there, like a spaceship fleeing to the safety of its home solar

system, *Earth* is firing on all cylinders: narrative, stylistic, psychological, philosophical.

“Science fiction has one main question,” Hawley argued in a recent interview, “And that question is whether humanity deserves to survive—in all these stories of the first contact or going out into the universe and meeting species that are either smarter than us or more deadly than us.” This dilemma consumes what might be the most internationally influential sci-fi work of the current century, Chinese author Cixin Liu’s *The Three-Body Problem*, which Netflix adapted last year as an English-language series. Even the new Superman movie flirts with the idea that our fractious species might be improved by an infusion of alien seed into the gene pool. As the climate crisis escalates, as deaths keep mounting in Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan, as authoritarianism trends, it’s not hard to see why storytellers are framing the prospect of extraterrestrials annihilating—or fundamentally altering—humanity as a potentially positive outcome for the planet, if not the universe.

In *Earth*, that questioning takes the form of Hawley’s critique of hypercapitalism and ambivalence toward AI. The Five, as the ruling syndicate is called, exerts unchecked financial and legal power over Earth’s population. When Wendy’s human brother Hermit (Alex Lawther), a Prodigy technical officer and medic,

appeals to the company to release him from his contract so he can fulfill his dream of attending medical school, a synthetic arbitrator coldly rejects his request. Conceived before Donald Trump's return to Washington but rife with resonance about Elon Musk's stint there, the scene illustrates the dehumanizing potential of AI-abetted corporate supremacy.

What, you may ask, does this all have to do with aliens? Well, you can't spell *alien* without *AI*; androids have always been part of the franchise**,** though the timely anxiety about human-synthetic hybrids is new. In *Earth*, the two are more thematically linked than ever. Both are superintelligent, lethal, existential threats to humanity—for which humanity has no one to blame but itself. Though one is a human innovation and the other hails from a distant world, neither would've posed a danger had greedy tech barons not released them from the Pandora's box of scientific progress. Some of the series' most subtly chilling scenes show aliens manipulating their captors with the ease of a person commanding a well-trained dog. So it makes sense that Wendy, who is at first fixated on reuniting with Hermit, comes to wonder whether she might feel more of an affinity with the specimens in the lab.

By reframing aliens as a mirror of and metaphor for AI, while calling back to *Aliens*' villain, a murderously self-interested

Weyland-Yutani employee (played by Paul Reiser as the archetypal ’80s yuppie), *Earth* preserves the franchise’s best tropes but also expands and updates its palette of ideas. Hawley has described his exploration of “humanity and the terrible things that we do to each other” as a form of “moral horror” layered beneath the “body horror or creature horror.” The latter are still very much present, in new iterations of the movies’ perennial pregnancy ick; one of the best episodes of the season could stand alone as a mini *Alien* feature. But it’s the moral horror that makes *Earth* more than another goopy interplanetary melee.

Hawley worked from a similar playbook with *Legion*, whose apparently schizophrenic superhero filtered a fast-evolving cultural conversation around mental illness through a psychedelic kaleidoscope, and especially *Fargo*. A quirky, darkly comedic crime anthology set, like the film, in a snowy Midwest, *Fargo* has cannily applied the Coens’ good-vs.-evil framework to discourse around such fraught topics as gender and race. Hawley places infinite trust in his audience’s intelligence and patience. Occasionally, as in the obscurity of *Legion*’s later episodes or the plodding pace of some *Fargo* plots, this approach can verge on self-indulgence. But mostly, at a time when some streamers tailor their programs to avoid confusing viewers glued to their phones, it’s refreshing to watch TV that treats you like an adult.

Fargo’s most haunting image comes at the very end of Season 3, written around the time of the 2016 election. An avatar for good and an embodiment of evil sit face-to-face, locked in an eternal clash of wills. “There is a sense to which this year’s *Fargo* is really a mirror reflecting our reality back to us at this moment in time, but we don’t know how it’s gonna end,” Hawley said when it aired. If that show suggests he’s a moralist—one caught between optimism and pessimism about not just whether humanity will prevail, but about whether we should—*Alien: Earth* confirms it. And in this four-way staring contest that pits people against corporations, AI,

and aliens, the permeable mammalian eye faces stiff competition indeed.

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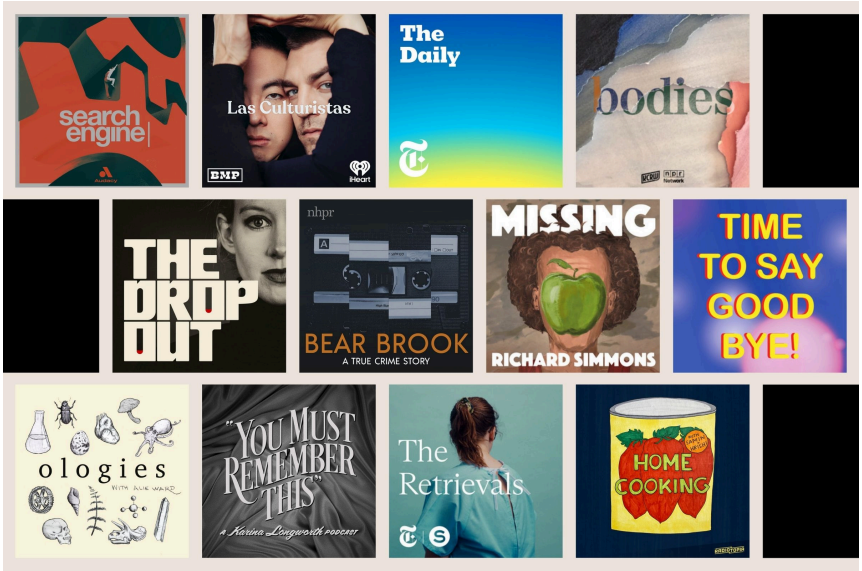
https://time.com/7306915

How We Chose the 100 Best Podcasts of All Time

Dockterman is a correspondent at TIME. She covers culture, society, and gender, including topics from blockbuster movies to the #MeToo movement to how the pandemic pushed moms out of the workplace.



You're folding laundry or going for a run or prepping your kids' lunchboxes, and you need something in your earbuds. Maybe you want to catch up on the latest news or hear the hottest take on last night's game. Maybe you're eager to hear a film critic tell you what's worth streaming this weekend or listen to a celebrity interview that'll make you laugh—or inspire a cathartic cry. Maybe you want to play detective in a true-crime mystery. If you've ever stared blankly at Spotify or YouTube wondering what to press play on, there is something for you in this list of the 100 best podcasts ever made.

Reviewing the nearly decade's worth of "best of" lists I've compiled since I started on the podcast beat laid bare just how much the medium has changed. Once upon a time, you didn't have to be an A-lister with a professional studio setup to find overnight

fame. The likes of Roman Mars, Mike Duncan, Sarah Marshall and Michael Hobbes, Hrishikesh Hirway, and Phoebe Judge all became famous names in the podcast space without the boost of a Hollywood career. Between the mid-2000s and the mid-2010s, all you needed was a microphone and a dream of cutting an ad deal with MailChimp. That low barrier to entry eventually led to a podcasting boom in the late 2010s that accelerated when so many of us were stuck at home during COVID-19 lockdowns and desperate to consume as much content as possible to stave off boredom and loneliness.

No longer are podcast hosts just disembodied voices in a void. YouTube, the world's largest video platform, now claims it's also the world's largest podcasting platform, with 1 billion monthly viewers of podcasting content worldwide. As Vulture recently noted, publications like the New York *Times* are pushing their writers and podcasters to put their faces on camera as the way we consume news and other content evolves on platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

With the change in medium has come a shift in focus. Major podcast producers have largely abandoned in-depth investigative reporting and quirky comedic voices in favor of buzzy names. This includes former upstarts like Alexandra Cooper (SiriusXM paid $125 million in 2025 for her Unwell podcast network) and Bill Simmons (Spotify acquired The Ringer for a reported $250 million in 2020). But more often, they cut deals with previously established celebrities like the *Smartless* actors or retired athletes like LeBron James—not to mention former royals and first ladies. But not every famous person is *good* at podcasting. (There's a reason the late-night gig is so tough.) Much of collating this list, when it came to this particular breed of pod, involved sorting out who can conduct an insightful interview or piece together a compelling monologue from who is just a big name.

That said, we talk a lot at TIME about influence—we do publish an annual list of the 100 most influential people in the world, after all. And that list increasingly includes podcasters. The legacy of shows ranging from *Serial* to *2 Dope Queens* to *WTF With Marc Maron* that pioneered their respective genres and set the course for what would follow factored heavily in this process. *Serial* helped spur the true-crime wave—and the many ethical quandaries that came with it. *2 Dope Queens* represented an era when relatively unknown comedians could land an HBO special. Remember when Maron got then-president Barack Obama on *WTF*, and it was a huge deal? Trump doesn't make the rounds of the manosphere and Kamala Harris doesn't appear on *Call Her Daddy* had Obama not graced Marc Maron's garage.

So I included some shows that have ended their runs. I tried to pick podcasts that, if not entirely evergreen, have a hefty archive that can be revisited—series that cracked jokes that haven't gotten old or covered books and movies you can still read and watch before tuning into a specific episode that will help you appreciate them more fully. With this list, I endeavored to find the best of the best, a database you can sort through by genre. Much ink has been spilled over the years about the parasocial relationships we form with podcast hosts, and, yes, while it's wise not to get *too* attached to a stranger, I certainly think of my favorite hosts as imagined buddies I get to visit with each week. I hope you can find new friends too.

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https://time.com/7303677

With Highest 2 Lowest, Spike Lee Gives Us Another Great New York Movie

Zacharek is the film critic at TIME. She is the recipient of a Newswomen's Club of New York award and was a 2015 Pulitzer Prize finalist.

No filmmaker loves the dirty old town that is New York more than Spike Lee. Some of us who live there will return from a day out and about—a day whose adventures might include traversing streets strewn with trash, riding in a subway car that smells like an animal stall, or catching news of some terrible shooting or stabbing (though that happens less often than you'd imagine)—and still think, This, and nowhere else, is home. Spike Lee's *Highest 2 Lowest*, playing out of competition here at the Cannes Film Festival, is a new entry on the scroll of great New York films. It's smart, hugely entertaining, and profound in a way that's anything but sentimental. With Akira Kurosawa as his guiding star—the film is a reimagining of the Japanese master's 1963 *High and Low*, a police procedural with a deep moral underpinning—Lee has made a film that feels modest and grand at once, the kind of movie you

can see on a Saturday night just for kicks and still be thinking about the next day.

Denzel Washington plays David King, a record-company mogul who was riding high in the early years of the 21st century but whose company is now barely breaking even. That company, Stackin' Hits Records, is up for sale, but King doesn't want to give it up. Instead, he's scrambling to buy back his controlling stake. His wife, Pam (Ilfenesh Hadera), knowing the state of the couple's finances, isn't so sure, but she supports her husband. Their plans shift drastically when King receives a phone call informing him that the couple's teenage son, Trey (Aubrey Joseph), has been kidnapped; his best friend Kyle (Elijah Wright), the son of King's chauffeur and closest friend, Paul (Jeffrey Wright, father of Elijah in real life), has gone missing as well. Within minutes, a phalanx of cops shows up at the couple's swanky apartment; they advise King on how to proceed. Tension hangs in the air like the luxe mod chandelier suspended from the penthouse's impossibly high ceilings. And then Pam and David learn that Trey has been found. The kidnappers grabbed the wrong kid; they've got Kyle instead.

Read more: Gladiator II *Belongs to Denzel*

Highest 2 Lowest has been adapted rather faithfully from Kurosawa's version, which was based on a novel by Evan Hunter. (The crisp screenplay is by Alan Fox.) That means the initial moral quandary—should King feel obligated to pay a $17.5 million ransom, money he doesn't really have, to save a kid who's not his own?—is resolved rather quickly. But King's hesitation to save his best friend's child, even in the face of Paul's anguish, tells us something about him. As a guy who's built a fortune signing artists who've got the goods, King has the best ears in the business, as one character after another reminds us. But even he balks, for more than a few hours, at the idea of saving his friend's kid. He's the kind of guy who'll do the right thing—eventually. That's not a damnation of him; it's just a reminder that it's human nature to put

oneself first. We all stumble, at one time or another, on the path to generosity, and Washington is terrific at capturing the texture of all those little doubts that hold us back; he can turn a modest squint into a signal of intense moral reckoning. And he has more than one terrific scene with one of his costars, the roguishly charismatic A$AP Rocky: they play off one another with the crackling competitiveness, and camaraderie, of ace jazz musicians trading eights.

The rest of *Highest 2 Lowest* fulfills every expectation you might want from a modern Spike Lee movie. Though Lee gave us one of the greatest New York movies of all time—and one of the greatest movies of all time, period—in 2001, with *25th Hour*, he hasn't made a movie set in New York since 2012's *Red Hook Summer*. This one, shot by Matthew Libatique, is gleamingly beautiful right from the opening sequence, in which the city unfolds, in all its iridescent pigeon-feather splendor, as "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" soars on the soundtrack. As tunes go, this one, with its half-homespun, half-surreal reference to corn growing as high as an elephant's eye, is the opposite of urbane. But the incongruity is the point: as an expression of spontaneous daybreak joy, it's unparalleled. Similarly, Howard Drossin's magnificent score—sometimes majestic, sometimes achingly melancholy—follows the movie's shifting moods perfectly. Every choice Lee has made pays off handsomely, and the movie's action centerpiece—involving a subway chase, a Puerto Rican Day celebration featuring salsa great Eddie Palmieri, and a motorcycle relay of exquisite precision—might be the most beautifully edited sequence you'll see all year. (Lee's editors here are Barry Alexander Brown and Allyson C. Johnson.)

We knew from the beginning that Lee was a rulebreaker and a groundbreaker. But he's also a traditionalist, an inventive and energetic one. He honors those who came before him; he's studied them, taking their lessons to heart. That's how you get a lustrous entertainment, one with a soul, like *Highest 2 Lowest.* Sometimes

great craftsmanship, especially in a mainstream film, just makes you want to shout. Doesn't anyone else get tired of the workaday TV and movies getting pushed before our eyeballs week after week, fodder made with just a base level of competence, if that? Lee has made some pretty imperfect movies during his long career—but so have most of the greats. He may go through periods where he makes films that are just OK, but then he raises the bar. And then he raises it again. As others' standards sink, his climb higher—higher, even, than an elephant's eye. The top of the Empire State Building is next.

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https://time.com/7286946

Benny Safdie on Playing the Villain in Happy Gilmore 2—And Christopher Nolan Telling Him to Get in Shape for The Odyssey

McCluskey is a staff writer at TIME. She covers culture, focusing on horror, fantasy, and science fiction.

***Warning: This post contains minor spoilers for* Happy Gilmore 2.**

Nearly 30 years ago, Christopher McDonald left an indelible mark on pop culture with his performance as smarmy professional golfer Shooter McGavin in the 1996 sports comedy classic *Happy Gilmore*. Opposite Adam Sandler's quick-to-anger hockey failure-turned-unlikely golf sensation Happy, McDonald played Shooter as an arrogant yet moronic, finger-gun-blasting, third-person-talking prick of a man.

Now, Benny Safdie is taking up the reins of *Happy Gilmore*-verse villainy as Frank Manatee, the halitosis-plagued creator of Maxi Golf, a new stunt-based golf association intended to rival the long-

established Tour Championship league in *Happy Gilmore 2*. And, according to Safdie, if he can inspire “even an eighth of the level of hatred Shooter did,” he’ll consider his character a success.

After co–directing Sandler alongside his brother, Josh Safdie, in the acclaimed 2019 crime thriller *Uncut Gems*—a film that earned its prolific lead the most serious awards consideration of his career—Safdie says he “instantly” accepted when Sandler called to offer him the role of Manatee in the long-awaited *Happy Gilmore* sequel, which hits Netflix July 25.

TIME spoke with Safdie about *Happy Gilmore 2*, buzzy forthcoming projects like *The Smashing Machine*, and his work with some of the biggest directors of our time.

TIME: What was your relationship to the original *Happy Gilmore* prior to taking on this role?

Safdie: Oh my god. It’s one of my favorite movies of all time. I can close my eyes and see it from beginning to end. There’s so many Shooter McGavin quotes. There’s so many Sandler quotes. It just was on repeat for me. With Shooter, there’s such a level of like, wow, this guy is truly evil but he’s so fully realized. And then Happy is almost like a parable of a guy. He’s definitely got his issues, but at the same time, he’s really nice and loves his grandmother. Sandler is just special. It’s almost crazy to me that I’m even in this thing because that movie was such a big part of my childhood.

What did you most want to bring to the character of Frank Manatee?

When Sandler called me to play this, he said there was something about one of my stand-up characters that he thought would be great

for this role. So I instantly was like, all right, I know exactly how this guy looks. I wanted him to be one of those people you swipe past on Instagram and are like, “Oh, I know that guy.” He speaks in broad platitudes about how to succeed. He’s an energy drink disruptor. I really wanted to make him as real as possible because that’s one of the things I think is really successful about Shooter. And I was able to bond with Chris [McDonald] about how these guys don’t think they’re bad, they just think they’re doing what’s necessary. So I really wanted to bring a level of authenticity. I wanted him to make sense.

How would you describe your creative relationship with Sandler?

There’s a closeness. I look at him and I’m just like, “Ah, there’s the Sandman.” There’s a real affection and connection there. And it’s interesting because we’d always wanted to act together in something, but it never worked out. It’s one thing to work with him as a director, but then to be in a scene with him and actually look into his eyes and act is amazing. He’s such a perfectionist. He really cares about everything he’s doing and wants it to be the best that it can be. There was one line we were really trying to hammer home: “Will you stop with the shoe? We’re done with the shoe!” That was one he really wanted to hit hard. And it was amazing because it just kept going and going. We did it so many times. He had a very specific cadence. So he and I are both after the same thing, which is doing whatever it takes to make it as funny and great as possible.

What is it about Sandler’s acting style that you feel allows him to play both these slapstick, over-the-top comedic characters and more nuanced, thoughtful dramatic roles?

I think he's giving as much thought to both of them. It was amazing to see him as Happy because I was like, "Oh my god. That's not Adam Sandler. It's Happy Gilmore." That was the coolest thing because Happy is a character of his. It's like [Charlie] Chaplin and the Little Tramp. And he's playing these roles with as much thought and care as he's doing the other ones. I don't think he makes that distinction. He's also just a really sensitive person and he allows that to seep into things. Even in *Gems*, it was amazing because he always wanted [his character] Howard to have this softer side. He really pushed for that and, when you look back at the movie, it's so important that was there. He wants people to be able to relate to him.

You're definitely flexing your comedy muscles in *Happy Gilmore 2*. What appeals to you about comedy versus more dramatic roles?

I treat the comedy roles no differently than the others because I'm doing just as much hard work trying to make it feel believable. But I do love comedy and I always want to make somebody laugh. There's a feeling on set where you want to ruin the take. You want people to be laughing at the monitors. You want to hear them go crazy and know that you went there. I did stand-up comedy and so I really enjoy that kind of no-net performance. I don't get to do it that often.

Your next directorial effort is *The Smashing Machine*, which stars Dwayne Johnson as UFC champion Mark Kerr and is already generating Oscar buzz. What was it like working with the Rock on his first big awards-contender role?

It was incredible, because with this project we both saw something in Mark's story that we really connected to. It was almost non-verbal. I could just see how passionate he was and I felt the same way. So it was really us trying to understand ourselves through this character. I felt like I could ask him to do anything and he would pull it out like it was nothing. It was really special to be a part of. He had a lot of respect for Mark and [his wife] Dawn and it was really about being truthful to their experience. There's a UFC tagline that my wife got me on a shirt: "As real as it gets." We just took that to the extreme.

How do you decide where to focus your energy when it comes to acting versus directing?

I don't, really, because I'm lucky enough that if there's something I really want to do, I'll figure out a way to make it happen. I was editing *Smashing Machine* while I was acting in *Happy Gilmore*. So I literally had my laptop out in my trailer when I wasn't working on scenes. And I look back on it and am definitely like, "How did I do that?" I don't even know. You just kind of compartmentalize things. It was the same thing with *The Odyssey*. I was in the middle of editing when Chris [Nolan] called me and was like, "How's your body?" And I was like, "What do you mean? Like, how's it holding up in the edit?" And he says, "No, I want you to be in this and you have to be in better shape." And I was like, OK, I have to do that now. So then I was exercising and thinking about what I was eating and going to these crazy locations, and then coming back and working on finishing *Smashing Machine*—all while dressed as Frank with that hair and goatee.

As a director, do you take notes from the directing greats like Christopher Nolan, Claire Denis, and

Paul Thomas Anderson who have directed you as an actor?

One hundred percent. There's certain things they'll do that will ignite something within me and I'm like, "Oh, that's how they do it." So I'll try and reverse engineer those things and use them to my advantage. I think it's about being willing to go in and put yourself out there. There's a vulnerability. Like, I was going to speak with a Hungarian accent [in *Oppenheimer*] and Chris' implicit trust in me gave me the confidence to do that. Or Paul will gently try to get you in this competitive headspace so you want to be the best that you can be. And Claire is just always searching for something exciting. She'll stand up in the middle of a scene because she wants to be excited by it and was bored when everyone was sitting down. It's interesting to see the connection between all of them, because when somebody's doing it right there's kind of a throughline to it.

You did an as-told-by essay with *Vulture* about how much you loved the 2024 animated film *Flow*. Would you ever consider making your own kids movie?

Definitely. I want to be able to experience a movie that I made with my kids and talk to them as an audience. I think there's something really special about that.

Is there anything you can say about the possibility of another season of you and Nathan Fielder's TV series *The Curse*? Would you want to make more?

It's funny because we had an idea for a second season early on but then the first season really does work as its own self-contained thing. So there is a really funny idea for it and I think it would be

good, but I don’t know. Nathan and I also didn’t even want to make a show together. We just accidentally came up with this idea and then it was one of those things where you have a friendship with somebody and it becomes a fun thing to talk about. I love his style of acting and I really liked pushing him to places he may not have gone before. I remember telling him, “When you get really angry, it’s not funny. But there is something funny about it.” He’s also somebody who’s obsessed with realism in a very different way than I am. He’s obsessed with making you look at a real thing and then be like, “That’s not real, right?” And I’m obsessed with looking at something and being like, “All right, this is fake, but I need to convince people it’s real with every ounce of my being.” So those two things do overlap in a nice way.

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