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TIME

THE OCEANS ISSUE

THE MOST IMPORTANT PLACE ON EARTH

by
ARYN BAKER

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Photograph by Paul Nicklen—SeaLegacy

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Impact in action

From Aug. 7–9 in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, TIME Impact House was a new place for influential conversations. Sponsored by UBS, programming focused on equity in philanthropy and featured speakers like former Attorney General Eric Holder *(bottom right)*. "The right thing to do is also the smart thing to do," entrepreneur Tulaine Montgomery *(near right)* told TIME's Janell Ross. For more, visit **time.com**

Far left, from left: TIME CEO Jessica Sibley, 11-time Olympic track medalist Allyson Felix, and TIME chief marketing officer Sadé Muhammad; near left: Holder

Equality's march

In honor of this August's 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, TIME hosted an Aug. 10 dinner in Atlanta for more than 100 leaders. Held at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, in partnership with American Family Insurance, the event featured speakers including Stacey Abrams, former Georgia house minority leader, who talked about honoring Martin Luther King Jr. "We must live his legacy by living the March every single day," she said. "And together we can march towards that dream." Read more at **time.com/atlanta-dinner**

New TIME Studios doc

The TIME Studios documentary *Ayenda*—screened at the 2023 Tribeca Film Festival—will air on MSNBC on Aug. 27 at 10 p.m. E.T. and will be available on Peacock. It follows members of the Afghan women's soccer team after the Taliban regained control of Kabul in 2021.

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SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In "The Boiling Point" (Aug. 14), we misstated the name of a contributing reporter; he is Moises Velez Saez.

On the covers

Illustration by Tim O'Brien for TIME

Photograph by Cristina Mittermeier—SeaLegacy

Photograph by David Butow for TIME

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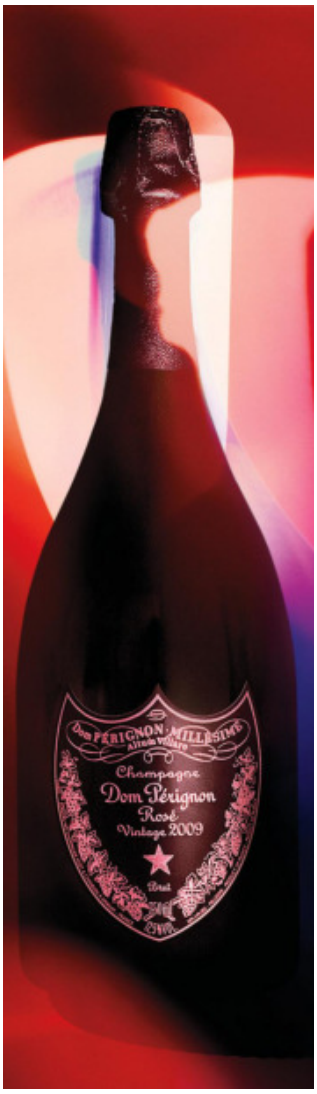
DOM PÉRIGNON AND THE ART OF CREATION

Every vintage of Dom Pérignon is a one-of-a-kind work of art. With its absolute commitment to vintage, Dom Pérignon is a perpetual creation. Bearing witness to every year, each vintage gives a new form to a perennial creative ambition: striving towards harmony as a source of emotion.

All harvests are different, resulting in distinct wines, which cellar master Vincent Chaperon artfully blends in order to reach the Maison's vision of harmony. It's a 15-month creative process that never ends in the same place. To reveal the creative process behind every Dom Pérignon vintage, the Maison – together with Vincent Chaperon – gave life to Dom Pérignon Pré-Assemblages: A space to explore the journey behind the vintage-to-be before its maturation in the cellar for at least eight years.



This year's creative intent: from matter to light.

For Dom Pérignon, the act of creation originates in nature's raw material, elevated to bring out the light of harmony that radiates within the final assemblage. But in 2022, with a changing climate upending 150 years of grape-growing traditions, the winemakers found themselves compelled to improvise and innovate. Weather patterns unlike any they'd ever encountered required Chaperon and his colleagues to rely on their creative instincts to craft a vintage that would embody the year's distinctiveness. The journey through the seasons began in early 2022, while the vines were still recovering from the year before. Chaperon and the Dom Pérignon team waited anxiously for April, when the Maison's pinot noir and chardonnay grapevines would emerge from hibernation. After two decades spent facing climate change's capriciousness, they didn't know what to expect. At first, spring dawned warm and sunny. But when the vines started flowering ten days early, they knew nothing would go smoothly.

A late burst of cold, rainy weather upended things further. Each vineyard was maturing at a different rate, with some grapes growing too large too quickly, while others were still too small. As temperatures climbed, the Champagne region slipped into drought. By mid-August, vineyards that were usually late to ripen were already ready to harvest, while those that were usually ready first were still weeks from ripeness. Faced with conditions he'd never encountered before, Chaperon had to create an entirely new harvest strategy.

By November, the team had created 107 distinctive new wines – 46 chardonnay and 61 pinot noir – that embodied different aspects of the year. But creating a Dom Pérignon vintage requires one more step: assemblage.

This is the ultimate act of creation, when the cellar master blends the best of the year's wines to bring to life the new vintage. After the unprecedented 2022 wine-growing experience, Chaperon decided to continue experimenting. He ventured off the beaten track to explore uncharted creative territories, with the help of several oenologists, sparking spontaneous dialogues, improvising like a group of jazz musicians.

From this arose two creations:

Improvisation 2022, the unexpected fruit of this collaborative creative session, in which the lights of improvisation shone through to face the challenges of unforeseen climate conditions. And, Assemblage 2022, the vintage-to-be.

However, the true mystery of Dom Pérignon is that even Chaperon doesn't know how a vintage will turn out. It first has to spend at least a decade maturing in the Maison's cellars. Fortunately, it can still be celebrated in the meantime. Chaperon decided it was time to experience another wine created from a similarly hot, dry summer: Dom Pérignon Rosé Vintage 2009.

After 12 years of maturation in the cellar, Chaperon opted to debut the wine at the annual Révélations event, a rendez-vous that showcases his creative process and disclose Dom Pérignon's mystery. Tasting the Rosé Vintage 2009 for the first time, Chaperon and the whole team were thrilled to discover how vibrant and full-bodied it was, a true incarnation of the fruit of the harvest.

Whatever 2022 ultimately reveals, it will no doubt be yet another distinctive Dom Pérignon work of art.

Dom Pérignon champagne should be enjoyed responsibly by adults over 21.

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The Brief

AFTER THE FLAMES

BY KARL VICK

In the Maui wildfires, a summer of climate warnings reached a hellish crescendo

INSIDE

A SHARP PANDEMIC RISE IN EARLY PUBERTY

TEACHERS EMBRACING AI IN CLASS

HOW TO STRENGTHEN YOUR FRIENDSHIPS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID BUTOW FOR TIME

IMAGES OF SMOLDERING LANDscapes have been coming out of Hawaii as long as there's been photography. But those pictures are about creation: In an archipelago built around volcanoes, eruptions are additions. And when lava brings destruction, it does so slowly, with so much warning, photographers can gather from around the world to document it.

Wildfires are different. Lahaina vanished in less than a day. A brush fire that sprang back to life on Aug. 8 had, by midmorning on Aug. 9, reduced the historic city of 13,000 to the color of ash. The death toll, which surpassed 100 on Aug. 15, marked the wildfires as America's deadliest in more than 100 years. At least 2,200 structures burned. Some people survived by climbing into the sea.

By the time they arrived, what awaited news photographers—including David Butow, on assignment for TIME—was the human effort to navigate the brutal topography of climate change. "The particular skills of the local culture came into play immediately," he recalled. "Rescuers and relief supplies were ferried in a range of craft, from large tourist boats to Jet Skis and traditional Hawaiian canoes."

In the summer of 2023, weather reports sounded like Klaxons, and the very sky pulsed red with warning. Even in a world with technology that might mitigate future harms, we are confronted again with our powerlessness in the face of humankind's own past actions. So the news from Maui carried a potency beyond the devastating tally of deaths. Much of what makes Hawaii feel like paradise is a culture of harmony, first of all with nature. But the islands have also grown hotter, drier, and subject to extreme weather, like the wind that drove flames down the mountain and people into the sea. There is no escape.

Clockwise from top left: a woman hoses down a friend's property in Kula on Aug. 12; the hillside town suffered property damage but no deaths; people affected by the fires receive free goods from the Costco in Kahului; a bird lies dead in Lahaina

Lahaina on Aug. 14. Of the more than 2,200 structures that burned, most were residential

SEWER
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POLITICS

Why Trump's Georgia case may matter most

BY PHILIP ELLIOTT

THE SIGNS IN GEORGIA WERE THERE FOR MONTHS. BACK in February, the forewoman of a special grand jury hinted that her advisory panel had recommended criminal charges against "not a short list" of familiar names in connection to an effort to overturn the results of Georgia's 2020 presidential election. The prosecutor asked a county judge in May to keep the courthouse clear and prepared for any potential violence, just in case she moved ahead with a second grand jury seeking an indictment of ex-President Donald Trump. On July 27, orange barricades encircled the Fulton County courthouse compound, telegraphing as clearly as possible that the former Leader of the Free World was about to face a judicial summons, even as he leads the pack of rivals for the Republican Party's nomination in 2024.

And on Aug. 14, those convinced Trump may have acted illegally in his attempts to set aside his legitimate loss in Georgia in 2020 found they were not alone: the Fulton County district attorney and a grand jury agree. The indictment they handed down includes 13 state charges of racketeering, soliciting a public official to violate their oath, and conspiracies to impersonate a public official, to commit forgery, to falsify writings and statements, and to file false documents.

Fulton County DA Fani Willis' indictment brings the number of criminal cases against Trump to four, after he became the first President to ever be criminally indicted earlier this year. He now faces 91 criminal charges in four jurisdictions, and will need to juggle numerous trial dates with the packed 2024 primary calendar. (Trump has pleaded not guilty or denied wrongdoing in all charges.)

It's been a busy August. Just two weeks before Willis, Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith brought felony charges against Trump for similar alleged attempts to subvert the will of the voters in 2020 and his alleged role in fomenting the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol. On Aug. 1, Smith charged Trump with a conspiracy to defraud the United States, a conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, obstruction of and attempt to obstruct an official proceeding, and a conspiracy against voting rights.

Presidential pardons don't apply to state charges

The charges are severe, and may offer catharsis for those seeking accountability for the violence in D.C. that sent scores of career politicos into therapy for the trauma that comes when a federal office building becomes a war zone. But however historic and powerful the Justice Department's case, the Georgia prosecution appears to be the most formidable.

THE 98-PAGE INDICTMENT describes a state fending off the predations of a President. The sweeping charges allege an organized effort to illegally change the vote count and send fake electors to Washington to make Trump the winner in the state instead of Joe Biden. The alleged conduct in the indictment includes a phone call during which Trump asked Georgia's secretary of state to "find" him enough to votes to win, harassment of an election worker, an effort to appoint a false slate of electors, and a scheme to access voting machines. Along with Trump, 18 other people will also face charges under Georgia's antiracketeering law for their alleged roles in the plot, including his former personal attorney Rudy Giuliani and former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, along with other allies. And the 41-count indictment suggests there are 30 other unindicted co-conspirators.

Crucially, Georgia may be the only case that Trump cannot escape with a self-pardon or payment; presidential pardon power applies only to federal charges, and the other state case in New York doesn't carry potential jail time. That's why the Georgia case could be the most durable, most threatening, and most important headache facing Trump. As he runs to occupy the Oval Office again, Georgia's indictment may set up a collision course over whether state laws can compel a President to face the music, even if he's busy prosecuting wars, negotiating trade deals, or trying to keep Americans' national security safe. The country has never faced a scenario of determining whether someone in the clink can also have the nuclear codes. This is no longer

The Brief includes reporting by Koh Ewe, Olivia B. Waxman, and Julia Zorthian

Members of the media in front of the Fulton County courthouse on Aug. 15

MEGAN VARNER—GETTY IMAGES

an academic exercise. Voters—including GOP-primary voters—will have to consider that remote possibility.

In typical fashion, Trump blew off both election-interference indictments with personal screeds against prosecutors, dubbing Willis "Phoney Fani." Previous indictments have boosted Trump's fundraising. But there are signs of fatigue; each indictment day has proved less profitable than the one prior. And his rivals for the nomination are growing slightly more bold as they watched the fourth—though almost all of them have publicly attacked the charges.

Trump's allies will naturally find a way to brush aside the latest counts too. The first New York *Times*/Siena College poll of the 2024 cycle, released in late July before the Smith or Willis indictments, indicated Republicans were indifferent to the allegations against Trump regarding election tampering. Among GOP-primary voters, 71% said the base should rally behind Trump as he faces investigations. And 71% also don't think Trump has committed serious crimes. But the more cases Trump faces, the more real the potential consequences become. And in Georgia, where courtroom proceedings are routinely televised, reality TV may take on new meaning for the defendant. ◻

THE BULLETIN

China wants to limit children's smartphone use

CHINESE REGULATORS have proposed curbing youth smartphone addiction by requiring device- and appmakers to have a "minor mode" that would limit daily usage to, at most, two hours by those 18 and under.

China tied for first on a list of 24 countries for problematic cell-phone use by youth in a 2022 study. The consequences, beyond exasperated parents, can be serious, with links to unproductivity, antisocial behavior, higher stress levels, poor sleep quality, and mood disorders.

Citing the importance of young people to the country's development, President Xi Jinping's government has previously introduced measures to regulate youth tech addiction, like limiting the time children can play video games to three hours per week and cracking down on online fandom culture.

MINOR MODE The new required smartphone setting, when enabled, would limit daily use to 40 minutes for those under 8 years old, an hour for those under 16, and two hours for those under 18. Parents are "encouraged" to activate it on their children's devices; exiting the mode would require their approval.

Minor mode would also bar access to web forums that discuss fundraising, online polls, and spamming. Features related to emergency services and education programs won't be subjected to limits.

The proposal is in a comment period until Sept. 2, but the announcement sent Chinese tech shares tumbling. "There are all sorts of businesses which provide services to children online," Minglu Chen, senior lecturer at the University of Sydney, tells TIME, "so their interest would be hurt massively."

SIGNALING? How effective the ban will be remains to be seen. The proposal, by the Cyberspace Administration of China, wasn't clear on enforcement. Penalties for violators weren't specified, causing concern among tech companies worried about being held accountable for implementing the new rules.

China has a strict real-name registration system, which allows it to monitor—and regulate—internet use. But many children seeking to play video games beyond already imposed limits have found work-arounds, from using fake IDs to visiting smartphone arcades.

Alfred Wu, associate professor at Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, tells TIME the proposal appears to be more of a "signal" to tech firms and children rather than a hard-and-fast rule: "It's very much like stepping into an area [where the] government actually has no control in reality."

—CHAD DE GUZMAN

GOOD QUESTION

Why did early puberty spike during the pandemic?

BY HALEY WEISS

ITALY NOTICED FIRST. IT WAS THE FIRST COUNTRY TO lock down during the COVID-19 pandemic, and later in 2020, researchers at Florence's Anna Meyer Children's University Hospital were the first to point out a puzzling trend: more young girls than ever before had been showing up at the hospital with clear signs of early-onset puberty.

The cases weren't unique, but their frequency was. Since early-onset—or "precocious"—puberty first gained widespread clinical attention in the 1990s, it's become steadily more common worldwide. Defined as the appearance of secondary sex characteristics such as breasts, pubic hair, and vocal changes in girls 8 or younger and boys 9 or younger, precocious puberty has been difficult for researchers to attribute to a single cause. But a mysterious, pandemic-generated spike in cases has provided experts with a new opportunity to revisit their dominant theories in hopes of an answer. Case studies have now rolled in from clinics around the world, many of which saw at least a two- or threefold increase in precocious-puberty diagnoses after March 2020. In China's Henan province, for example, doctors at 22 facilities saw five times as many cases in 2020 as they did in 2018.

There's no conclusive answer about what causes premature development, though research shows that the constellation of factors at play includes stress and trauma, as well as lifestyle habits like poor diet and lack of exercise that are tied to weight gain in children. Pandemic measures saddled children with this exact package of pressures.

Precocious puberty is most often diagnosed in girls, because "puberty in girls is more visible," says Sena Orsdemir, a pediatric endocrinologist at the Loma Linda University Children's Hospital. Growing breasts is often a public experience, and developing early can mean a minefield of unwanted attention. Then there's the distress of watching their bodies evolve, which can be jarring even for those old enough to have received proper context and education. "First- and second-graders, they're not mature enough to handle this type of body change," says Orsdemir. "That is a big stress for a young girl." Perhaps as a result, early puberty has been linked to mood disorders and some behavioral issues. Precocious puberty can also put children at risk years later for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and certain reproductive cancers.

Though some cases are easily traceable to genetic or anomalous causes, precocious puberty has most often been linked to obesity. Decades of research have found that childhood body weight is a strong predictor of menarche, or the onset of menstruation, in particular. Childhood obesity is a growing problem worldwide, which could help explain why precocious puberty has remained on the rise.

'They're not mature enough to handle this type of body change.'

—SENA ORSDEMIR, PEDIATRIC ENDOCRINOLOGIST

STILL, NONE OF THIS sufficiently explains the explosion in precocious puberty during COVID-19. The newest wave of research has zeroed in on stress as a key driver. "We know from recent data that the psychosocial burden before and after the pandemic is increasing dramatically," says Mohamad Maghnie, head of the pediatric clinic at the Giannina Gaslini Institute at the University of Genoa in Italy. When he saw the spike in 2020, he says, "my first thought was focused on lifestyle changes related to social isolation." In his latest study, Maghnie and his team identify lifestyle changes as contributing factors that many children faced during the pandemic, such as poor eating habits, decreased movement, impaired sleep, and excess screen time. They found that of patients seen during the first 15 months of the pandemic, nearly 90% had stopped all physical activity.

Because many of these lifestyle changes are also linked to obesity, it's difficult to tell whether they contribute to the onset of puberty by altering weight, stress levels, or both. It's also possible the pandemic simply meant that parents spotted signs of precocious puberty earlier because of being confined with their children.

Researchers aren't sure yet whether the increased rate of precocious puberty has continued after lockdown, but anecdotal evidence from clinics suggests it has. Orsdemir believes that this is because people, including children, have not returned to their prepandemic habits. "This is becoming normal now," she says. ◻

PUBERTY: CYNDI MONAGHAN—GETTY IMAGES; REUBENS: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; BIDEN: JONATHAN ERNST—REUTERS

LIFTED
The **final COVID-19 restrictions** that remained in New Zealand, which instituted some of the world's strictest pandemic rules, including mandatory isolation periods, by Prime Minister Chris Hipkins on Aug. 13.

ASSASSINATED
Ecuadorian presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio, 59, on Aug. 9, while campaigning against government corruption and narcotraffickers, who were blamed for his killing.

REBOUNDED
The population of **Brazil's endangered golden lion tamarins,** from around 200 in the 1970s to some 4,800 today, according to an Aug. 1 study that credits conservation efforts.

WON
A **landmark climate lawsuit** brought by a group of young people against Montana, after a judge ruled on Aug. 14 that it was unconstitutional for the state to disregard climate change when approving fossil-fuel projects.

DIED
▸ Actor **Angus Cloud, who played Fezco on HBO's *Euphoria,*** on July 31 at 25.
▸ **Director William Friedkin, whose films included *The Exorcist*** and the Oscar-winning *The French Connection,* on Aug. 7 at 87.
▸ Music executive and industry titan **Clarence Avant, who spurred the careers of icons** including Whitney Houston, Bill Withers, and Janet Jackson, on Aug. 13 at 92.

DIED

Paul Reubens

Forever in character

PAUL REUBENS—BEST KNOWN FOR HIS CHARACTER PEE-WEE Herman—died on July 30 at 70 after a private battle with cancer. "Please accept my apology for not going public with what I've been facing the last six years," Reubens wrote in a statement posted to Instagram after his death. "I have always felt a huge amount of love and respect from my friends, fans and supporters. I have loved you all so much and enjoyed making art for you."

The character Pee-wee Herman, introduced in a 1978 improv class, first made it big in 1981 with *The Pee-wee Herman Show.* Reubens began to do interviews and tour only as Pee-wee, creating the impression that he was a real person. In 1985, *Pee-wee's Big Adventure,* directed by Tim Burton, recouped its $7 million budget nearly seven times over. From 1986 to 1991, the live-action children's program *Pee-wee's Playhouse* was a hit with both kids and parents. Reubens aimed to shape Pee-wee into a positive role model, intentionally imbuing the show with a moral compass. It came as a surprise to many when Reubens was arrested in 1991 on charges of indecent exposure in an adult theater; he denied the charges in a statement, then pleaded no contest.

But in the early aughts and 2010s, Pee-wee returned, bringing back *The Pee-wee Herman Show* and releasing the 2016 movie *Pee-wee's Big Holiday.* By the time of his death, Pee-wee—and Reubens—had been largely accepted back into the public fold. Outpourings of love and support appeared across social media after his death. "Love you so much, Paul," tweeted the actor Natasha Lyonne, who got her start on *Pee-wee's Playhouse.* "One in all time. Thank you for my career & your forever friendship all these years & for teaching us what a true original is." —LAURA ZORNOSA

APPOINTED

Special counsel

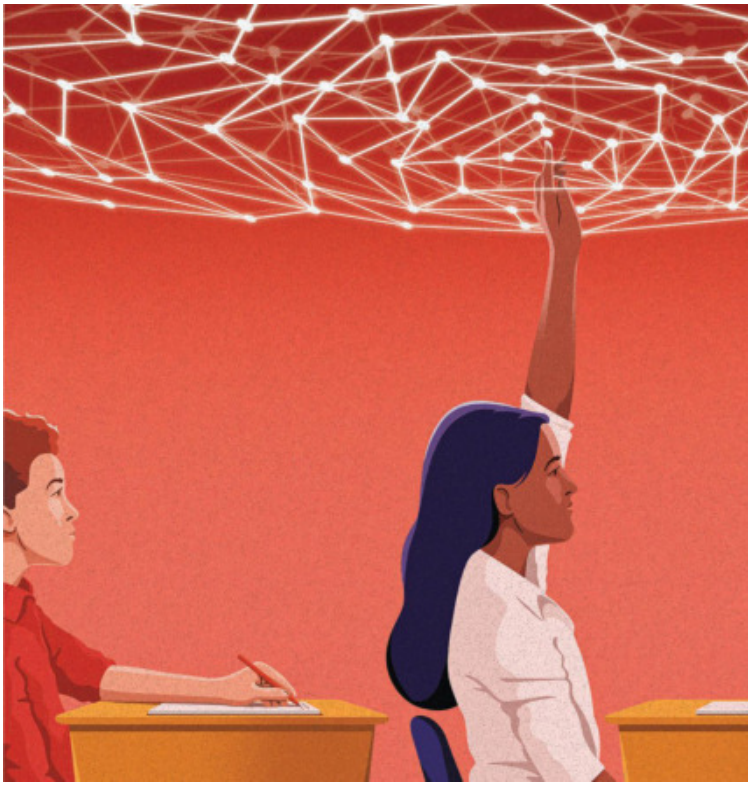
In Biden probe

In July, the legal hardship facing Hunter Biden appeared to be nearing an end. He had reached a plea deal with prosecutors that would keep him out of jail, settled a child-support case with the mother of a child he fathered, and started making regular public appearances again with his dad, the President. It seemed as if he would finally turn the page on his troubled past.

But it didn't quite work out that way. On Aug. 11, Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed a special counsel in his case: David Weiss, the U.S. Attorney in Delaware who negotiated the plea deal, which had fallen apart. Weiss has said that he plans to indict Hunter Biden on tax charges, but he could also use his new, wider authority to levy additional charges in the case, like a potential violation of the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Whatever happens will likely be over months, keeping any sins of the son in headlines during the campaign of the father. —*Nik Popli*

‹ *Hunter Biden on July 26*



BACK TO SCHOOL

The creative ways teachers are using AI

BY OLIVIA B. WAXMAN

PETER PACCONE, A SOCIAL-STUDIES TEACHER IN SAN Marino, Calif., has a new teacher's aid helping him in the classroom this year. He plans to defer to his helper to explain some simpler topics to his class of high schoolers, like the technical aspects of how a cotton gin worked, in order to free up time for him to discuss more analytical concepts, like the effects of the first Industrial Revolution.

His new assistant? ChatGPT.

"What I feel that I don't have to do any longer is cover all the content," Paccone told a group of more than 40 educators in a May Zoom workshop, which he organized. If artificial intelligence is on the cusp of reshaping entire aspects of society—from health care to warfare—the realm that leaps first to many minds is education. Asked a question online, ChatGPT will produce an answer that reads like an essay. So students and teachers preparing for a new school year are also grappling with AI's implications for learning, homework, and integrity. Paccone is among many high school teachers already experimenting with ChatGPT in the classroom. But the tool is inspiring as much trepidation as it is excitement.

Earlier this year, as OpenAI.com, the website of the company that produced ChatGPT, became one of the 50 most visited websites in the world, some of the nation's largest school districts, from New York City to Los Angeles, banned its usage in the classroom while they worked to formulate policies around it. Meanwhile, teachers desperate to figure out how to harness the tech for good congregated in Facebook groups like ChatGPT for Teachers (about 300,000 members) and The AI Classroom (more than 20,000 members).

"The majority of the teachers are panicked because they see [ChatGPT] as a cheating tool, a tool for kids to plagiarize," says Rachael Rankin, a high school principal in Newton Falls, outside of Youngstown, Ohio.

But Paccone and a growing group of educators believe it's too late to keep AI out of their classrooms. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, a major teachers' union, believes the panic about AI is not unlike the ones caused by the internet and graphing calculators when they were first introduced, arguing ChatGPT "is to English and to writing like the calculator is to math." In this view, there are two options facing teachers: show their students how to use ChatGPT in a responsible way, or expect the students to abuse it.

AS TEACHERS WRESTLE with whether to use AI in their classrooms this year, they're also learning about the pernicious ways that abuse can take place.

At another Zoom teacher-training workshop that TIME observed in July, hosted by Garnet Valley School District in Garnet Valley, Pa., education consultant A.J. Juliani ran through various AI apps that students are using to cut corners in class. Photomath lets students upload a picture of a math problem and get detailed instructions on how to solve it. Tome can turn notes into a narrative. And Readwise can highlight key parts of PDFs so that students can get through readings faster. "Many of them are just using it to do the work because they're bored," Juliani said. "They're not engaged. They don't care. And we have to own up to that."

> **'My students have never been so engaged.'**
>
> —SARAH MILLARD
> ENGLISH TEACHER

Many of the more than a dozen teachers TIME interviewed for this story argue that the way to get kids to care is to proactively use ChatGPT in the classroom. Some creative ideas are already in effect at Peninsula High School in Gig Harbor, about an hour from Seattle. In Erin Rossing's precalculus class, a student got ChatGPT to generate a rhyme about vectors and trigonometry in the style of Kanye West, while geometry students used the program to write raps about mathematical proofs, which they performed in a classroom competition. In Kara Beloate's English Language Arts class, she allowed students reading Shakespeare's *Othello* to use ChatGPT to translate lines into modern

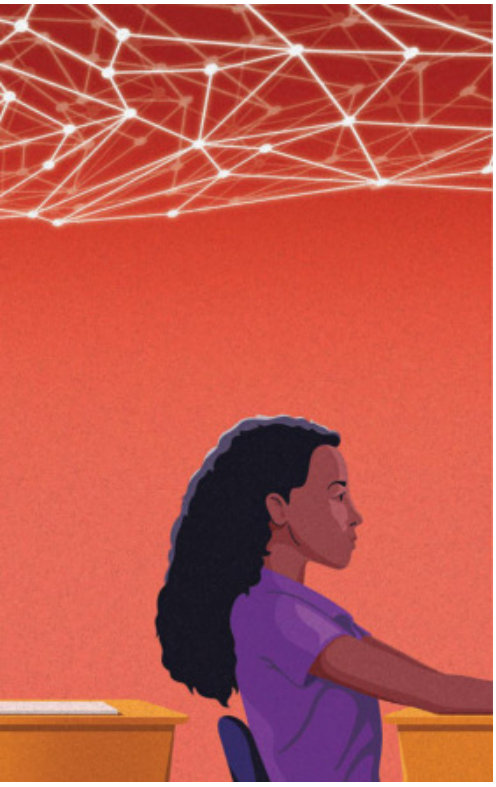


ILLUSTRATION BY PETE REYNOLDS FOR TIME

English to help them understand the text, so that they could spend class time discussing the plot and themes.

ChatGPT doesn't always get things right—but teachers are finding that provides its own way to engage students. Some are having students fact-check essays generated by the program, hoping to simultaneously test students' knowledge of the topic and show them the problems with relying on AI to do nuanced work. In the Detroit area, Sarah Millard, a ninth-grade honors English teacher, had students critique a ChatGPT-generated essay on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. "My students have never been so engaged in writing," Millard says. "They wanted to beat the computer" and were "tearing apart" the AI-generated essay.

Teachers are even finding ChatGPT is a time saver for their own homework. Larry Ferlazzo, who teaches English, social studies, and international baccalaureate classes in Sacramento, has had AI help write college-recommendation letters for some of his students. He says it did the task "10 times better" than he would have alone.

WHILE MANY EDUCATORS seem to agree that an outright ban on ChatGPT in the classroom is not the answer, they differ on how much it will change schools.

Some think it will be a revolution. "There's a tidal wave coming for education," says Dan Fitzpatrick, an author and keynote speaker on AI in education and administrator of The AI Classroom Facebook group. "Our schools could really find themselves irrelevant in the next few months to a few years."

Others believe it may become a useful tool, but the basics of schooling won't change. "I've lived through probably nine hype cycles of AI and education where visionaries proclaim that this is the big breakthrough—and then it isn't," says Chris Dede, a senior research fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education who is an expert on the history of educational technologies. "Generative AI is certainly not, in my opinion, some kind of enormous breakthrough that's going to transform education."

There are real concerns about ceding too much instruction to the program: Weingarten of the teachers' union and others fear it will promote educational inequities, further dividing classrooms into students whose families have the resources to afford the high-speed internet connection that eases access to ChatGPT and students whose families do not. There are also worries about biases in the data AI uses to craft its answers to users' prompts.

And it will be no small challenge for teachers to figure out how to use the technology to develop students' critical-thinking skills without sacrificing the meaningful connections that can be the product of human-to-human teaching. When it comes to getting knowledge to stick, there may be no substitute for human relationships.

"I've been to former students' weddings and baby showers and funerals of their parents," says Millard, the high school English teacher in Michigan. "I've hugged my students. I've high-fived my students. I've cried with my students. A computer will never do that. Ever, ever." ◻

Q&A

The Secretary on education

THE TWO YEARS THAT MIGUEL Cardona has been in the nation's top education job haven't exactly been serene: In June, the Supreme Court rejected President Joe Biden's student-loan-forgiveness plan and, in another ruling, essentially overturned affirmative action. The nation is in the midst of both a teacher shortage and a wave of book-banning attempts. At the same time, students are still working to recover from pandemic-era learning loss.

The Secretary of Education covered all that, plus ChatGPT, in a July conversation with TIME.

When the student-loan-payment pause ends this fall, what do you say to borrowers who won't be able to make ends meet? We announced the best income-driven repayment program in our country's history, which will change the experience for so many borrowers. It cut in half the college payments that are due to undergraduate students. We're also going to fight really hard to continue with debt relief. The Supreme Court got the decision wrong.

With the Supreme Court effectively overturning affirmative action, what practices could build more diverse student bodies at the nation's top colleges and universities? That's another example where the Supreme Court took us backwards—a really, really wrong decision. It ignores the fact that in this country, as much as we're fighting for an equitable system, it's still not there—we could be talking about health care access, higher-education access, K-12, education outcomes. Black and

brown students, particularly, have to work twice as hard to get to that starting block.

The math and reading performance of 13-year-olds in the U.S. hit the lowest level in decades, per test scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). What needs to be done? It's appalling how the Nation's Report Card continues to remind us not only of how poorly our students are performing, but also of the impact of a pandemic. There's a plan for bringing qualified teachers into classrooms because we can talk about reading and math all we want, but we have a teacher shortage. If we're not hiring highly qualified teachers, it's going to be difficult to get those numbers up.

How can learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic be reversed? This Administration put out $130 billion to address the impact of the pandemic. What we've seen is the dollars being used to provide after-school tutoring support for students, summer-school programming. More students attended summer school in the past several years than ever in the history of our country. We've seen the money being used to provide reading teachers in classrooms for students that are falling behind; to provide laptops and level the playing field; to provide support for professional development for teachers who are now supporting students that have faced some trauma—maybe their students lost someone during the pandemic, or are dealing with some anxiety because of the pandemic. The NAEP data is a sobering reminder of the work that we have to do. But we are seeing progress.

The American Library Association reported that efforts to ban books nearly doubled from 2021 to 2022. What can the Department of Education do to help school districts facing book-banning attempts in the next year? Book banning is an example of the folks who have political aspirations trying to keep their name on the national radar, very selfishly at the expense of our students. Parents don't want anyone in the state capitol telling them which books they should have. It's a direct attempt to censor what our students are reading and ignoring our country's history. [Attempts are targeting] primarily books on the history of the Black and brown experience, students who are marginalized, books that represent the diversity of our country. We need to call it what it is: attempts to further marginalize a marginalized group.

Cardona visits Avondale Elementary School in Columbus, Ohio, on April 20

'The Supreme Court took us backwards.'

—MIGUEL CARDONA, EDUCATION SECRETARY

Do you think teachers should use ChatGPT with students? Let's face it, our students are going to be using it. It's important that we help them use it responsibly. We need to do a better job providing our teachers with professional learning opportunities to learn it themselves. With artificial intelligence, we have the opportunity to move past some of the rote memorization and really think about problem solving and analysis and deeper levels of thinking and learning.

What would you tell young educators who are thinking about leaving the profession because of burnout? Burnout is real. I get it. But this is a time when our students and our country need you most. On average, teachers make 27% less than other peers with similar degrees. That's unacceptable. I'm calling on states to step up education funding and make sure that educators are being paid competitively.

But to that young person that wants to become a teacher: you have an Administration in office right now that's fighting hard for you, and that's supporting you.

—OLIVIA B. WAXMAN

BROOKE LAVALLEY—COLUMBUS DISPATCH/USA TODAY NETWORK/REUTERS

5 ways to strengthen a friendship

BY ANGELA HAUPT

IT MIGHT SOUND OBVIOUS, IN THE midst of a loneliness crisis, that having friends matters. But many of us "underestimate the very real impact our friendships can have on our life," says Marisa Franco, a psychologist and author of *Platonic: How the Science of Attachment Can Help You Make—and Keep—Friends.* "Connection is the most important factor predicting our health, both physical and mental."

A growing body of research supports that point: Healthy, stable friendships can protect against depression and anxiety, increase life satisfaction, extend longevity, and improve health metrics like blood pressure and body mass index. Those who don't have strong social connections, meanwhile, have an elevated risk of heart disease and stroke, Type 2 diabetes, addiction, and dementia. While many people assume it's the number of friends that counts, research indicates that quality is more important—and having even a small selection of close friends is a stronger predictor of happiness than having lots of casual connections.

Yet often people who feel disconnected focus on making new friends instead of nurturing existing connections. "There can be this feeling of 'I need to look elsewhere. I need to start a whole new circle of friends,'" says Miriam Kirmayer, a clinical psychologist who studies the science of friendship. "For many people, it's helpful to think about the friendships we already have in our lives. Even if they feel a little stale, there are ways we can revive them."

We asked experts to share their favorite ways to strengthen friendships and breathe new life into old bonds.

1. Consistently invest time

Making time for the people we care about and having shared experiences play an essential role in deepening friendships. Research suggests that it takes about 50 hours of time together to transform from acquaintances to casual friends, 90 hours to become regular friends, and more than 200 hours to solidify a best friendship. If you find you're continually dropping the ball on putting in time and effort with your friends, add a section for connection to your daily to-do list, advises Laura Tremaine, author of *The Life Council: 10 Friends Every Woman Needs.*

2. Add more positivity

One way to grow any relationship is to foster positivity, says Shasta Nelson, author of books including *Friendships Don't Just Happen.* "It's not always about saying positive things," she clarifies. If you're in a bad mood, be open about how you're feeling, and give your friends permission to feel differently while expressing curiosity about what's new in their lives.

3. Get vulnerable

Another key to cultivating stronger friendships is allowing yourself to be vulnerable. Start by sharing small opinions, like what you thought about your book club's latest choice. Dive even deeper by telling your friends what you're currently struggling with and what scares you. "When we're vulnerable, we feel like we're burdening people," Franco says. "But being vulnerable conveys that we like them and trust them. And fundamentally, that brings people closer together."

4. Mix in some novelty

It might be time to inject a shot of new energy into your most familiar friendships. That goes for both conversations and activities: we tend to talk about the same topics over and over, and meet at the same places at the same times. "Carve out moments of conversation where you can go off script," Kirmayer says. And brainstorm new adventures you can embark on together, like traveling to a bucket-list destination or joining a pickleball team.

5. Show up for the important moments

Every friendship will inevitably arrive at what Franco describes as diagnostic moments: the highs and lows in life that "disproportionately affect" how we label our relationships. Was your friend there when you got a promotion, were diagnosed with something scary, or went through a divorce? The answer plays a large role in determining how much we'll value that friendship.

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The View

HEALTH

THE PARENT TRAP

BY JENNY ANDERSON

American teens are having a hard time. High school students reporting chronic feelings of sadness and hopelessness rose from 1 in 5 to 1 in 3 from 2008 to 2019, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). By the pandemic fall of 2021, the feelings were reported by 42% of high school students and almost 60% of girls. The thing is, a lot of parents are in really bad shape too.

INSIDE

THE 'BLACK LUNG' DISEASE OF THE CLIMATE-CHANGE ERA

THE MYTH OF WALKING 10,000 STEPS

QUESTLOVE ON THE DAY HIP-HOP DIED

The attention to the kids makes sense. The CDC's 2021 data showed a quarter of teen girls had made a suicide plan. Social media has been blamed for the rise in mood disorders, as have sleep deprivation, spikes in loneliness, and academic pressure.

One of the key ways we can bolster teens' mental health and buffer the vulnerable is healthy, attuned relationships with their parents. The trouble is, that can be problematic too.

According to two national surveys completed as the pandemic wound down in December 2022, about 20% of mothers and 15% of fathers reported anxiety, compared with 18% of teens. About 15% of teens reported depression, alongside 16% of mothers and 10% of fathers. In total, about one-third of teens had a parent suffering from reported anxiety or depression.

"Our data suggest that we would be just as right to sound the alarm about the state of parents' mental health as about teens' mental health," writes Richard Weissbourd, director of the Making Caring Common Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, one of the authors of *Caring for the Caregivers: The Critical Link Between Parent and Teen Mental Health.*

Depressed and anxious adults who are parents of teens are faced with the double whammy of trying to manage themselves while simultaneously supporting teens. For adolescents, worrying about a parent or caregiver can be destabilizing when life seems rocky enough. Weissbourd's data show that depressed teens are about five times as likely as non-depressed teens to have a depressed parent, and that anxious teens are about three times as likely as non-anxious teens to have an anxious parent. About 40% of those surveyed were at least "somewhat" worried about a parent's mental health.

The bottom line: if we want to help teens, we need to help their parents too. Depressed and anxious parents can be excellent caregivers. Their own experience can build empathy and give adults language they can use to help teens navigate similar emotional terrain. But research shows that children of parents with untreated depression have higher rates of behavior problems, difficulty coping with stress and forming healthy relationships, academic problems, and mental illness. If both parents and child are suffering, the two can set each other off, with adults lacking the energy required to focus on their child's struggles. Anxious and depressed teens will show frustration lashing out at caregivers.

BEING ATTUNED to kids' emotional states is a crucial way parents support healthy development. When infants cry, and parents attend to them, important stress-regulation skills are built. When a child babbles and a parent reacts gleefully, the child learns to keep talking and exploring. Child-development specialists call it "serve and return"—the baby serves up a sound or venture and the parent returns affection and love, building a bond of trust and helping the infant self-regulate. The ways we stay connected to our children change as they grow and mature. But the principle remains the same: a child's sense of self grows stronger and matures by being known, attended to, and by feeling they matter, first and foremost, to their parents or caregivers (though the influence of peers clearly grows as they age).

'Explaining what was happening ... was very helpful.'
—DR. WILLIAM BEARDSLEE

"The human relationship has the power to relieve stress, promote resilience, and restore a young person's sense of safety," says Pamela Cantor, a child and adolescent psychiatrist who specializes in trauma. Stress releases cortisol to the body and brain, which causes the feelings of fight, flight, or freeze. Having an adult who loves you unconditionally can buffer that. "Relationships that are strong and trustful release the hormone oxytocin, and oxytocin can restore a child's sense of safety," Cantor explains.

But for a parent who is depressed or anxious, it can be hard to connect with anyone, much less teens who are

GUIA BESANA—AGENCE VU/REDUX

Jedi masters at pushing parents' buttons. Providing the emotional support teens need becomes harder.

Depression has two main classes of causes, says Dr. William Beardslee, chairman emeritus of children's psychiatry at Boston Children's Hospital. One probably involves genetic vulnerability: families with a lot of history of depression tend to have more depression. The second is psychosocial adversity, negative life experiences such as poverty or the effects of violence and racism. "The single, probably largest risk factor for depression," Beardslee says, "is having a parent die when you're a child."

One of his key takeaways from a longitudinal study of families with diagnosable mental illness was that the children of parents with mood disorders have higher rates of mood disorders themselves. Another takeaway was "even in that situation, many of the kids were resilient and doing well."

Beardslee pioneered an intervention called "Family Talk." In families with depression, the "depression shut down the capacity to have conversations and problem-solve together," he explains. The program

involves talking to each party separately—parent and child—and then helping the adult plan a conversation about what depression is, who's getting treatment, how they're going to overcome it, and then actually having the conversation in a family meeting, led by the parents and assisted by the clinician.

"We found that explaining what was happening and saying the kids can be normal and happy despite depression and the parents can be very good parents despite depression was very helpful," Beardslee said. Actively being part of the conversation is also powerful for a depressed parent.

Weissbourd's report, which cites Beardslee's work, also emphasizes communication. The key, it says, is ensuring that teens know adults' lashing out or withdrawing love is due to the illness and not the child: "It can make a big difference if a parent simply tells a teen, 'I'm struggling with some things right now. If I seem shut down or irritable, it's not your fault."

The report offers other insights for parents, depressed or not. When teens were asked what they needed from adults, the No. 1 answer—40% of respondents chose it—was for their parents to "reach out more to ask how [they're] really doing and to really listen." As one teen said, "Don't only look at me through the keyhole. Open the door."

Adults also need to recognize that teens are feeling lost. If this sounds trite, it is not. Of teens surveyed, 36% reported little or no "purpose or meaning in life," and this absence strongly correlated with depression and anxiety.

Adolescence is a period of massive brain reconstruction and identity formation. A key way that identity is formed is through meaning—finding ways to matter in the world. The tsunami of focus on "wellness" places too much attention on how to make ourselves happy and not enough on how helping others actually makes us happy, which study after study shows makes humans happier. In the media and public life, beauty and perfection sell, not altruism and kindness. That leaves it to us, the caregivers, to help teens find meaning, or at least hope.

Cantor cites research from Anna Freud, who studied the effect of World War II on children. Why did children who stayed with their mothers—enduring years of bombing in the Blitz—fare better than those kids who were evacuated?

"Somehow in the middle of the Blitz and London being bombed, a mother would say to a kid, 'We're gonna make it through this.' Did they know that? Did they have a crystal ball? No. But they knew that what they needed to do in that moment was to shore up their child's beliefs that this was solvable," Cantor says. The kids sent away didn't have that parental assurance.

"Humans heal," she emphasizes. "Mentally and physically. They solve things. The human experience is about solving things."

Anderson is a journalist and podcaster currently working on a book about the science of motivating teens

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Climate Is Everything

By Aryn Baker

SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

One of the enduring legacies of this summer's heat waves is a disease that few people have heard of. First documented in El Salvador's sugarcane workers 21 years ago, chronic kidney disease of nontraditional origin (CKDnt) occurs among manual laborers working in high-heat conditions.

Characterized by a progressive loss of kidney function, CKDnt has already killed tens of thousands. As temperatures increase because of climate change, those numbers will rise, contributing to **what is arguably the world's first occupational disease caused by global warming.** Like other workplace injuries, CKDnt can be prevented with increased safety standards.

Epidemiologist Jason Glaser has no doubt that CKDnt is already present in the U.S. "Absolutely everywhere we've looked that has that Venn diagram of heavy work and high heat with poor labor protections, lo and behold, there it is."

But in a dangerous oversight, public-health tracking of the disease in the U.S. is limited, says Glaser, head of the CKDnt-advocacy organization La Isla Network. "It's so easy to prevent," he says, yet with dialysis or kidney donation your only options, "so expensive to treat."

While the causes are still debated, it appears to be triggered by heat-related kidney injuries, like heatstroke, and is exacerbated by continued exposure and dehydration. Approximately 8% to 10% of workers with acute kidney injury (AKI) from heat will go on to develop CKDnt within 12 months, says Glaser. "This is the black lung disease of today's outdoor laborers, and climate change is making it worse."

Construction workers toil in the heat on a new subdivision being built in Loganville, Ga., in July

JOSÉ IBARRA RIZO FOR TIME

Sign up to learn how the week's news connects to the climate crisis at **time.com/climate-newsletter**

Health Matters
By Jamie Ducharme
HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I have ingrained in my brain the idea that taking 10,000 steps per day is the mark of an active lifestyle—which means it's often pretty depressing to check the step tracker on my phone after an average day of writing while seated at my desk.

At least, it was depressing until I read the conclusion of a recent research review published in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology*. The authors found that taking just **4,000 steps per day (the equivalent of walking around two miles) is enough to significantly reduce your risk of premature death**—and walking as few as 2,500 steps per day may meaningfully reduce your risk of cardiovascular-disease-specific causes of death. That's based on their analysis of 17 previously published studies on walking and health, which cumulatively included more than 225,000 adults from multiple countries who were tracked for an average of seven years.

The findings are no reason to shorten your daily stroll; walking more is better, the researchers found. They concluded that each additional 1,000 steps per day is linked to a roughly 15% lower risk of dying early from any cause, and they did not find evidence of a point at which additional activity stops being beneficial. So if you were already logging 10,000 steps a day, there's no need to stop.

But if, like me, you often fall short of that benchmark, you can take comfort in the fact that even relatively small amounts of movement seem to measurably benefit health and longevity.

That may sound too good to be true for 10,000-step devotees, but a number of recent studies—and the U.S. federal physical-activity guidelines—have reached similar conclusions. Some research has shown that mild forms of movement not typically considered exercise, like housework, can have a meaningful impact on overall well-being, while other studies have argued that there are real benefits to getting even a few minutes of physical activity each day. Exercise, it seems, is a powerful tool for improving health—even in encouragingly small doses.

For more health news, sign up for Health Matters at **time.com/health-matters**

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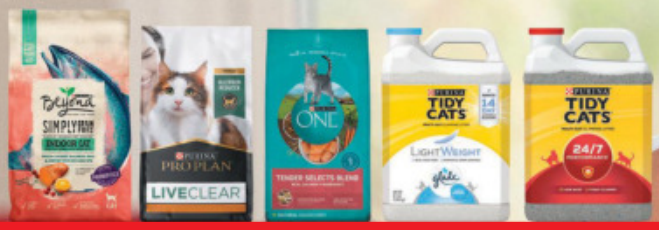

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MUSIC

The day hip-hop changed forever

BY AHMIR "QUESTLOVE" THOMPSON

From left: rappers Snoop Dogg, Biggie, Nas, and Dr. Dre

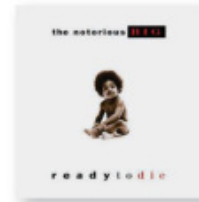
AS A PERSON WHO LOVES HISTORY, I'M one of those people who can spot a historical moment as it's happening—both as a participant and as an outside viewer. So, to be two years older than what we consider to be the birth of hip-hop, and to grow up with it like a sibling, is a fortunate feeling because I got to witness a lot of firsts. Sometimes, this shifting of paradigms was to the benefit of hip-hop and sometimes, unfortunately, to its detriment. But nothing could've prepared me for the moment when hip-hop, as I knew it, changed forever: the 1995 Source Awards.

The '95 Source Awards was a funeral in hip-hop's history, and I don't say that in hindsight. I knew it walking into the Paramount Theatre in New York City on Aug. 3, 1995, and I knew it running away. And when I say running, I'm not exaggerating. I was running for my life—it felt like the creative version of *Apocalypse Now.*

In 1992, Dr. Dre released *The Chronic,* and what made that album notable was that it signaled the first push toward the rock-star lifestyle in hip-hop. While not blatantly representing opulence, *The Chronic* was the blueprint that Sean "Diddy" Combs listened to and made the new standard. In the people's eyes, it was the first album by a credible producer and M.C. that didn't have to pander to a safe, we-come-in-peace formula that your grandma was singing to. The album put big numbers on the board and dominated MTV, and once New York saw that this was the golden ticket, suddenly everyone fell in line. Art was one thing, but survival became more important—and by any means necessary.

THAT WAS THE MENTALITY with which everyone was walking into the Paramount Theater in '95. The first person I noticed was Nas, who was making his way to a seat four rows ahead of me. The big question of the night was who was going to win Rap Album of the Year: *Illmatic* by Nas or *Ready to Die* by the Notorious B.I.G., a.k.a. Biggie? Having received a rare five-mic rating from the *Source* for *Illmatic,* Nas was the gold standard. It seemed like it could've been his night. But the momentum that Biggie had since his album came out was undeniable, and as he began to sweep one award after the next, Nas sank lower and lower into his seat.

By the end of the night, I knew that Nas was going to throw away everything, and do it: compete with Biggie. The result of that night was, in part, the release of his second album, *It Was Written.* And while it was Nas' most successful record, it came at a cost. Nas was open for business—adjusting his music so people who embraced *The Chronic* and *Ready to Die* would also embrace him.



It Was Written *by Nas, top;* Ready to Die *by Biggie*

Literally one by one, everyone realized that they had to compromise. And I don't mean compromise as a four-letter word, because nothing comes before your survival when you're a Black person. Because yes, even your art might have to be sacrificed. That realization, and the hopelessness that followed, was why the Source Awards was one of the most depressing days of my life. I didn't know if I had a future.

By the time they handed Dr. Dre the award for Producer of the Year, the energy became reminiscent of an old-fashioned western barroom brawl. All I remember was I grabbed my date, and we ran for our lives. The second we heard "Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg," I thought, We're all going to die.

And in a slow sort of way, I was right. The hip-hop that I loved was gone, and that night, the hourglass turned over. But as I was running, a guy in the street came up to me and said, "Yo, take this." He put the cassette in my hands, and it said D'Angelo, *Brown Sugar.* Normally, I never took demos, but I don't think it's a coincidence that on the day that I thought the culture was ending, I would meet the very person I would wind up creating *Voodoo* with, another paradigm-shifting masterpiece—a rebirth.

—*As told to* RACHEL SONIS

Thompson is a musician, author, and filmmaker

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"Life's more fun in the deep end!"

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EBANTIE
2024

The former President at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines on Aug. 12

POLITICS

DÉJÀ VU

IT'S GETTING LATE EARLY IN THE GOP PRIMARY, AS THE FRONT RUNNER'S RIVALS STRUGGLE WITH THE CAMPAIGN'S CENTRAL QUESTION: HOW DO YOU STOP TRUMP?

BY MOLLY BALL/ALBIA, IOWA

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEMETRIUS FREEMAN

THE IOWA VOTER HAD A QUESTION for Ron DeSantis—a plea, of sorts, on behalf of "all the small-town people."

Outsiders "suggest we're the flyover country, the racists, the deplorables, the Walmart shoppers," Jason Summers, a 53-year-old Republican activist who owns a small insurance business, tells the governor of Florida. Presidential candidates, he adds, "come around every four years, they kiss our babies, pat us on the head and send us on our way, and then they forget about us." How could the residents of Albia, Iowa—pop. 3,712—be sure that DeSantis wouldn't abandon them too?

Less than an hour earlier, DeSantis had roared into town juggernaut-style, disembarking from a bus emblazoned with his name and that of Never Back Down, his $100 million super PAC, trailed by a dozen advisers and security staff. DeSantis has vowed to visit all of Iowa's 99 counties—Albia's Monroe County would be No. 31—precisely for moments like this one, a chance to commune with voters and perhaps even to have the sort of viral moment that would loft his struggling campaign back into contention for the GOP presidential nomination. Now he stood in a former church converted to a veterans' wellness center, surrounded by a scrum of media, cameras and microphones extended to watch him take a swing at the softball Summers lobbed up.

But given the chance to offer some hint of emotion, DeSantis proceeds to answer the question like a standardized test. First, he says the stereotypes about flyover country are "not a narrative that I've ever accepted." Then he points out that while people may associate his state with "places like Miami or Palm Beach or Central Florida theme parks," it also has "a lot of those types of communities." They are important, DeSantis adds, in part because they produce many recruits for the military and law enforcement. "But I do think the clash of, kind of, elites on the coast is, these guys have really strong values here, and they don't always like that," he concludes, without a flicker of passion.

This is the man who was supposed to be the Trump Slayer. Yet as the 2024 campaign lumbers into gear, DeSantis has never looked like less of a threat to the former President's chances of returning to office. Bloodied by a barrage of typically nasty Trump insults and millions in negative ads from Trump's allies, his campaign has been a litany of disappointment, declining steadily in the polls since its botched Twitter launch on May 24. His culture-war message isn't moving voters; donors fret that he's not ready for prime time; pundits pick apart his every stilted move. The campaign has recently undergone an extended "reboot," laying off dozens of staff and replacing the campaign manager. Many of the same conservatives who once crowned him the future of the GOP are already declaring him toast.

It is somehow both early and late in a Republican primary campaign of maximum consequence, the race that will determine whether next year's election turns into the sequel that

few Americans claim to want: Biden vs. Trump, once again. Too early, rival campaigns and many voters say, for people to start paying attention and making up their minds about a primary season half a year away. And yet it already feels too late for anyone to lay a finger on Trump, whose lead in polls stands at 30 or 40 points.

The front runner, meanwhile, has put forth the minimum imaginable effort, sleepwalking through rote speeches, jeering at federal law enforcement, visiting Iowa only a handful of times. He's skipped campaign cattle calls, insulted the state's popular Republican governor, and danced around the abortion issue that animates many of the religious conservatives who make up the backbone of the GOP base. Just a week before the first Republican presidential debate on Aug. 23 in Milwaukee, he had not yet decided whether to bother showing up. And why should he? He is running away with this thing as rivals flounder and leap to his defense after each successive criminal indictment. Rather than condemn the actions that have now led to 91 state and federal charges, DeSantis, like most of the field, has bolstered Trump's claims of victimization, decrying the supposed "weaponization of government" and vowing to pardon the former President if he is convicted. "I think the Department of Justice is highly political. I think that the charges in D.C. are flimsy charges," DeSantis tells me in an interview, days

DeSantis meets the media during a July 27 campaign stop in Chariton, Iowa

before a Georgia grand jury hands down yet another Trump indictment for crimes against democracy.

Iowa's first-in-the-nation caucuses on Jan. 15 loom as the best chance to change the race's frozen trajectory. The state has a history of elevating long-shot, close-touch candidates, particularly those who win the hearts of religious conservatives. Many of these voters have continuing qualms about Trump, whose lead over DeSantis is slightly smaller here than it is nationally. In polls, some 70% of potential caucusgoers say they are open to a non-Trump candidate. Yet DeSantis has failed to make it the two-man race many anticipated, and no one in the rest of the field—a well-credentialed group that includes current and former governors, a sitting Senator, and Trump's own Vice President—has risen to take his place as Trump's chief rival.

And so the candidates have descended on Iowa, blitzing the airwaves with commercials, patronizing small businesses, giving speeches to local groups. The state's Republican voters see America "at a tipping point" and want above all to find a candidate who can win the general election, the longtime Iowa GOP chairman, Jeff Kaufmann, tells me. They want to see the candidates up close and personal, to look them in the eye and hear it straight. On his recent swings through the state, DeSantis has held town halls and meet-and-greets, popped into small-town coffeehouses, and traipsed through sweaty fairgrounds. "We've got to run the long race, not the short race," DeSantis' newly installed campaign manager, James Uthmeier, tells me. "It's back to basics, follow your gut, listen to the voters. Trump is not what's in the eyesight, it's the voters, the Iowans, the people that are struggling."

DeSantis, like everyone else, wants to believe the campaign is about something else—The Issues, the current President, the price of tea in China—when it is self-evidently about one thing and one thing only, the singular, binary question that has perplexed the political system for so many years: Can Trump Be Stopped?

In Albia, DeSantis takes a few more questions from locals and the media before being hustled back onto his campaign bus, where he'll head to the next flyover town, hit all his marks, make the intended contacts, and tick another county off the list. As the bus pulls out, I return to Jason Summers, who is chatting with the town's mayor on the steps of the former church. I bring up his poignant remark about politicians kissing babies and then forgetting about their promises. Did he feel Trump had done that?

Summers thinks about the question. "Honestly, I think just the opposite," he says. "One of the strange things about President Trump was that while he didn't have that small-town politeness, he identified with the small-town issues. That hardness that Trump speaks with, they looked over because he was actually fighting for them."

AT A TOWN HALL in the Des Moines suburb of Ankeny, a man gets up to ask Tim Scott a question. Reading from a notebook, Steve Alexander, a ponytailed local in a beret and vest, informs the Senator that he has a five-pronged test for candidates that he calls the "Five P's." On the first three—personality, politics, and performance—Scott has passed with flying colors. "It boils down to the last two things, promises and policies," Alexander continues. "One thing about Trump, he made promises and he kept 'em where it was possible."

Scott, the only Black Republican in the Senate and a devout Christian, has been rising modestly in the Iowa polls as DeSantis slips. His campaign and affiliated super PAC have blanketed the state with ads touting his sunny, aspirational appeal. A conventional, rank-and-file Republican—he helped design Trump's 2017 tax-cut bill and voted against both his impeachments, but did not object to certifying the 2020 election—Scott centers his campaign message on the idea that his life story puts the lie to liberal accusations of a racist society. "Where do I start?" he asks Alexander, grinning.

Scott talks about his record and outlines a set of proposals he would pursue on issues like taxes, school choice, and opportunity zones. He speaks with feeling about his upbringing, sprinkling in religious references and folksy sayings. At one point he describes Biden's spending policies as "like a goose lost in a rainstorm." A capacity crowd has packed the airy venue, and Scott's easy banter with Governor Kim Reynolds has them laughing along.

PREVIOUS PAGES: THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES; THESE PAGES: SERGIO FLORES—THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES

Afterward, he takes questions from reporters, including one about a controversy DeSantis faces back home over proposed Florida educational standards that say enslaved people sometimes benefited from skills they learned in bondage. Scott manages to attack the substance while seeming magnanimous at the same time: "What slavery was really about was separating families, about mutilating humans and even raping their wives. It was just devastating. I would hope that every person in our country, and certainly running for President, would appreciate that." But, he adds, "People have bad days. Sometimes they regret what they say."

Longtime Iowa hands insist the race is far from over. "Anything can happen," says David Young, a former member of Congress now serving in the Iowa state house. Mike Bousselot, a state senator representing a swing district, says Trump is a "polarizing figure" among his Republican constituents, many of whom would prefer to hear about his vision for the future rather than personal grievances. What unites them all, Bousselot says, is an intense focus on electability: "Universally, it's 'the next election is too important, we need to win.'"

Anti-Trump Republicans point to precedent to make the case that Iowans will slow his momentum. In the 2016 election, Trump cannonballed into the state, ignoring all the rules. He named a former *Apprentice* contestant as state campaign co-chair, brought a helicopter to the Iowa State Fair, and did little of the usual retail politicking. Most experts assumed the thrice-married former Democrat would not appeal to a state partial to humble, churchgoing candidates like the previous two caucus winners, former Governor Mike Huckabee and former Senator Rick Santorum. Senator Ted Cruz courted conservative voters with a data-fueled grassroots organization, while Senator Marco Rubio appealed to business-minded moderates—a typical GOP base-establishment split.

Trump, meanwhile, built an entirely new kind of coalition. In dying former factory towns in Eastern Iowa, I remember meeting crowds of blue collar voters who'd never be caught dead at a Rubio or Cruz event. Many had never caucused or weren't even Republicans. In the end, Cruz eked out a victory, 28% to Trump's 24%, with Rubio a close third at 23%.

The caucus electorate hasn't fundamentally changed since 2016, says Dave Kochel, a GOP consultant and adviser to Governor Reynolds. "All those people still exist, and they haven't all become Trumpers, even if they're all defenders of the tribe." With the right pitch, Trump's current rivals have access to both Cruz's social conservatives and Rubio's establishmentarians. "Iowa's going to be really, really important, and I don't think it's a slam dunk for Trump," Kochel says. "He's winning, no doubt about it, and somebody else has to catch some breaks. There's too many people in the field right now. The only way you're going to beat Donald Trump is by having one strong candidate against him."

Conservative groups who view another Trump nomination as a sure ticket to Losertown are carefully trying to pry his voters free, cognizant that reciting the former President's litany of well-known personal failings will merely trigger his tribe's defensive reflex. The Club for Growth's Win It Back PAC is airing ads featuring testimonials from Iowa voters who talk about their journey away from Trump. Americans for Prosperity Action, the super PAC affiliated with billionaire Charles Koch, plans to rally its deep-pocketed donors around a non-Trump candidate and will endorse later this year, officials say. Since late June, Americans for Prosperity's canvassers have been on the ground in the first four states to vote next year. "When we're actually knocking on doors talking to folks, we're finding people are open to thinking about the race more pragmatically," Drew Klein, the group's Iowa director, tells me.

In several days attending events across the state for numerous candidates, I met many of the voters AFP and other anti-Trump groups are targeting. They voted for Trump against Biden and Hillary Clinton, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, but now they are weary of the drama and ready for a

Trump's rivals for the nomination include, clockwise from top left, former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley, South Carolina Senator Tim Scott, and former Vice President Mike Pence

HALEY: CHARLIE NEIBERGALL—AP; PENCE: BRANDON BELL—GETTY IMAGES; SCOTT: SCOTT OLSON—GETTY IMAGES

fresher face. They like what they hear from DeSantis, Scott, and others, and they feel they have plenty of time to make up their minds over the next five months. Talking to these earnest, enthusiastic Republicans, the race can indeed feel wide open.

But when I ask them who they caucused for in 2016, these voters invariably say Cruz or Rubio, not Trump. For those trying to topple the front runner, the problem isn't the voters who are coming out to see them. It's the voters who aren't.

THE LINCOLN DINNER is the Iowa GOP's big fundraising event, and on a Friday night in late July, more than 1,200 Republicans take their seats at tables laid with chicken and cheesecake in the Des Moines convention center. An event like this is a chance for an underdog to make a splash: the 13 candidates on the program range from Trump and DeSantis to businessman Perry Johnson and pastor Ryan Binkley. The long-shot candidates would need a figurative lightning strike to put them into contention, yet still they won't risk the ire of the pro-Trump crowd. Only former GOP Congressman Will Hurd dares rock the boat. "Donald Trump is not running for President to make America great again or represent the people that voted for him," he says. "Donald Trump is running to stay out of prison." Hurd is promptly booed off the stage.

Trump is the last to speak. He walks onstage holding a folder with the presidential seal under one arm and proceeds to read his speech in a singsong voice, barely looking up or departing from the script, with the notable exception of a couple of insults directed at "DeSanctus." "I wouldn't take a chance on that one," he mutters, to laughs. When Trump finishes, before the allotted 10 minutes are up, the room erupts in a riotous standing ovation.

After the speeches, the candidates repair to "hospitality suites" along the concourse, where voters can visit with them one-on-one. It's on the concourse that I run into Chris Sununu, the governor of New Hampshire. A popular anti-Trump Republican who decided against running for President himself, Sununu is optimistic Trump will be vanquished. As a quasi incumbent, "of course he's going to be way ahead," Sununu says. But, he insists, "people know he can't win, and they're looking for someone else."

The former President's team can hardly believe how lucky they've been. Trump's campaign started under the shadow of a disastrous midterm election, a dinner with a white supremacist, and a lackluster November announcement. But the revelations that Biden and Mike Pence also improperly took home classified documents, along with the ongoing legal saga involving Hunter Biden, have helped muddy the waters despite pundits' protestations that those cases are orders of magnitude less severe than the criminal charges Trump faces in New York, Florida, Washington, and Georgia, which range from falsifying business records to conspiring to defraud the United States. And Trump's own rivals have echoed his argument that the various prosecutions are politically motivated. "It's a message that has a resonance with Republican voters," Trump campaign strategist Chris LaCivita tells me. What worries the campaign most at this stage, he says, is not any other candidate or any prosecution, but complacency.

Inside the convention center, a man strums a guitar in Nikki Haley's suite, while in DeSantis', people are invited to chuck baseballs at pyramids of Bud Lite cans, an allusion to a recent culture-war controversy. But the only suite with a line out the door is the one where Trump stands behind a black-clothed barrier, posing for thumbs-up pictures with fans. Annette Hoover, a 75-year-old retired saleswoman from Indianola, tells me she is "Trump all the way" and has been since the beginning. "I can see what's been going on is affecting him," she says, looking genuinely pained. "It's awful what they've been doing to him."

Hoover enjoyed listening to all the candidates, but only one of them, to her, is a President. "He's an a--hole, to be honest, but that's what it takes to deal with the people he deals with," she says. "We've got to get him back. We're in a world of hurt right now." DeSantis, she says, might make a good VP. —*With reporting by* JULIA ZORTHIAN/NEW YORK ◻

CHANGING CLOTHES

Inside Stella McCartney's quest to transform the fashion industry from within

BY NAINA BAJEKAL/LONDON

STELLA MCCARTNEY DOESN'T WANT YOU TO FEEL BAD. THE BRITISH fashion designer understands it's easy to get overwhelmed by all the ways the products we eat, buy, and wear come with unintended consequences—for society, for animals, for the planet. And so even if she's talking about the harrowing conditions workers suffer in fast-fashion factories or the devastating climate impact of animal agriculture, she's eager to emphasize that the goal isn't guilt. It's hard work to be the best you can be, after all, especially when what many of us want is seemingly impossible: to live more sustainably without giving up the luxuries and conveniences of modern life. We want to look good, feel good, and still somehow *do* good.

And so McCartney, 51, is trying to make that a little easier. Creator of the first ever vegan "It bag"—the slouchy faux-leather Falabella tote with a sleek silver-chain trim—McCartney has spent her career trying to show the world that ethical choices don't have to mean compromising on glamour. Since the launch of her namesake label in 2001, she has created luxury clothing that celebrates modern femininity—her brand is a closet staple for countless celebrities—while eschewing leather, feathers, and fur. She also made a name for herself as one of the cool girls of the noughties, out with with Kate Moss, Madonna, and Gwyneth Paltrow. (A 2000 *Vogue* profile called her "a girl who loves to make a little trouble, get a rise, stir things up.")

Two decades on, she remains a fixture on the high-fashion circuit, making clothing that is known as much for its sharp tailoring, minimal lines, and bold aesthetics as it is for its eco credentials. She's also a pioneer, collaborating with startups on the cruelty-free,

McCartney wears eco-friendly designs from her Winter 2023 collection, in London on July 5

PHOTOGRAPH BY VICKI KING FOR TIME

sustainable materials—like grape-based leather, forest-friendly rayon, and recycled cashmere—that made up 90% of her latest two collections. "All I'm trying to show is that you don't need to sacrifice," she says when we meet in her London office in July. "You're not being penalized for your choices."

McCartney had a running start: she's the daughter of two prominent animal-rights activists who wrote protest letters to companies involved in animal abuse, lobbied against fur, and published vegetarian cookbooks. They also happen to be music royalty: Beatles legend Paul McCartney and the American photographer Linda (who died in 1998), who built a home in the countryside but also took their kids on the road with their band, Wings. "One side was this farm life, and the other side was the stage, with glittery boots and glamour," McCartney recalls. "It was an early inspiration."

She has since established herself as a British fashion icon in her own right, designing the uniforms for Team GB Olympic athletes and Meghan Markle's wedding-reception dress. "It was impossible for fashion to think of luxury and sustainability in the same breath before Stella changed that," Anna Wintour, chief content officer of Condé Nast and global editorial director at *Vogue,* writes over email.

McCartney's work increasingly extends beyond her own label: in the past few years, she has met world leaders at the G-7 and the U.N. Climate Change Conference and co-founded the $200 million Collab SOS fund for climate solutions. As sustainability became a business imperative, her brand became more desirable. In 2018, she bought back the 50% stake that Kering had held for 17 years—only to team up the following year with Kering's chief rival, LVMH (Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton). There, she was appointed special adviser on sustainability to CEO Bernard Arnault, one of the world's richest men, who said in a statement that "a decisive factor was that she was the first to put sustainability and ethical issues on the front stage, very early on."

The minority stake provides both the freedom and the cash to continue innovations that might not turn a profit. Her namesake brand reported a loss of more than $40 million in 2021, the third consecutive year of a loss of more than $38 million, following the split from Kering and the business challenges of the pandemic. Now, as McCartney brings more eco-friendly materials into her own collections, she also collaborates with LVMH—Europe's largest company by market value—to encourage its other maisons (among them Loewe, Dior, and Givenchy) to do the same.

In an era when many make claims to sustainability, few have been doing it as well, as stylishly—or as long—as McCartney. "When I first started, I was definitely the eco weirdo in the room," she says. "But why would I compromise what I believe in morally to go into an industry I'm passionate about?"

WILD AT HEART

McCartney has long been a trailblazer for eco-fashion

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1. Stella McCartney, age 2, with father Paul and mother Linda, in 1973

2. McCartney flanked by models Helena Christensen, left, and Kristy Hume at her Fall 1998 Ready-to-Wear collection for Chloé in Paris

RAISED VEGETARIAN, MCCARTNEY traces her connection with nature to her childhood, which she spent riding horses on a remote Scottish farm and hiking trails in Arizona. Her parents may have been icons, but Linda, who had rejected her Park Avenue life to tour with rock stars, and Paul, the working-class Liverpudlian who became a household name in his 20s, wanted to keep their family grounded. They chose to send their four children to local schools, opting against the private education favored by wealthy Brits. "They had to take a bit of flak for having a famous dad, but it toughened them up," Sir Paul McCartney recalls, sitting in his office overlooking London's Soho Square. A Wurlitzer jukebox glows in one corner, and he points out a pair of spectacles that once belonged to René Magritte, a present from Linda. "Now I'm just showing off," the 81-year-old says, laughing.

He and Linda always had "slightly offbeat tastes in fashion," he adds, and from a young age, Stella would spend hours pulling together outfits from their shared closet. In 1997, just two years after graduating from Central St. Martins, the renowned art and design school in London, 25-year-old McCartney was appointed to succeed Karl Lagerfeld as creative director of Chloé in Paris. MORE *CLUELESS* THAN COUTURE, a *Vogue* headline read at the time. "I think they should have taken a big name," Lagerfeld sniped of his successor. "They did—but in music, not fashion."

"She had to prove herself," her father says. "I said, if she doesn't do well at the end of that year, then the name is not something to help, it's a cudgel to beat her with. But she did well."

At Chloé, where McCartney worked with her former classmate Phoebe Philo, the pair injected a raunchy sensibility into a French house known for soft femininity, designing low-slung skintight pants, see-through gold-chain tank tops, and skimpy sequin dresses. McCartney also stuck to her values; no collection she's ever designed has used animal products. She acknowledges that her ability to uphold her convictions comes partly from being the daughter of one of the most successful men on the planet. "As one of the first nepo babies," she says wryly, "I had the privilege of choice. I'm very aware of how lucky I've been to be accepted to work in this way since day one." Aja Barber, a stylist and author of *Consumed: The Need for Collective Change: Colonialism, Climate Change, and Consumerism,* commends how McCartney has used her platform to drive change. "The fashion industry runs on privilege and nepotism," she says. "So why isn't everyone making the same choices that Stella McCartney is making?"

Those choices are not always an easy sell to CEOs. "I've had moments where I've been challenged very heavily to change my morals for the success of the company," McCartney says, recounting instances when she was urged to incorporate leather into her line for better margins. (She has appealed to leaders to review policies that may favor leather goods over synthetic ones.)

But if fashion is meant to be about dreams and fantasy and escaping from reality, as McCartney says, that makes it hard to force a broader reckoning with its harms. The industry was responsible for more than 2 billion metric tons of greenhouse-gas emissions in 2018—equivalent to the output of the U.K., France, and Germany combined—according to McKinsey. Around 60% of all clothing winds up in landfills or incinerators within a year of production—the equivalent of a truckload of used clothing being dumped or burned every second. While cheap, accessible fast fashion drives much of the environmental degradation, luxury brands aren't exempt: in 2017, Burberry notoriously destroyed $37 million worth of merchandise to maintain its reputation of exclusivity. (It has since stopped the practice.) Every year, the global leather industry—on which luxury fashion houses depend—is involved in slaughtering more than a billion animals, while tannery workers are exposed to toxic chemicals. "*That* is the glamorous industry of fashion," McCartney says.

While concerns over animal cruelty were always front of mind, McCartney's focus expanded after the publication of a 2006 U.N. report that stated that livestock production is responsible for more emissions than the entire global transport sector. In response, she launched the Meat-Free Monday campaign in the U.K. with her father and her sister Mary, encouraging the public to adopt a weekly meat-free day, and examining how to make her own lines more sustainable. Paul says Stella's strategy of offering people better, ethical alternatives—rather than guilt-tripping them—was inspired by her mother, who launched a successful vegetarian-food business. "Linda was a pioneer and she was very strong, very ballsy, like Stella is," he says. "It's difficult. But she's showing it's not *that* difficult."

IN THE BRIGHT WHITE LOBBY of the Stella McCartney offices in West London, scenes from her widely praised show at Paris Fashion Week in March play on loop. Dappled gray horses canter alongside models wearing her Winter 2023 collection: furry overcoats, checked blazers, sharply tailored jackets, silky asymmetric dresses. The models sport thigh-high boots and carry handbags that, though you could never tell, are made from grapes, apples, or other plant-based materials.

Vegan fashion may not harm animals, but it can still harm the planet. Most vegan leathers are made from polyurethane (PU) or polyvinyl chloride (PVC), which can release microplastics into the environment. McCartney's team hopes to minimize such effects by working closely with startups to find greener alternatives that can match the quality and durability of leather. It's an incredibly complex, costly, and lengthy process: McCartney's team starts by testing swatches of each new material, examining its feel, scent, resistance to scratching or tearing; they then make a prototype handbag to test its color retention and strength. Feedback is relayed to the scientists to refine the material over months and years. A major part of the work, McCartney says, is communicating their needs to scientists unfamiliar with the fashion industry. "I know the product needs to be tested in this way, to drape, to breathe," she says, "to say 'That color doesn't work' or 'That fabric cracks.'" When the Stella McCartney

3. McCartney and Liv Tyler, whose "Rock Royalty" tops made headlines at the Met Gala in 1999, strike a pose with Gwyneth Paltrow

4. McCartney cuts the ribbon at her flagship store on Old Bond Street in London, in June 2018, with Kylie Minogue, Mindy Kaling, Neelam Gill, and Kate Moss

MICHAEL PUTLAND—GETTY IMAGES; FAIRCHILD ARCHIVE/PENSKE MEDIA/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN MAZUR—WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES; DAVE BENETT—GETTY IMAGES

team first met with NFW, the company that makes Mirum—a plant-based, plastic-free, and circular leather alternative—in March 2022, the material was too thick for anything other than firm, structured bags. But through working with them, a thinner, more flexible option is now available.

These collaborations often involve startups in early stages of development, and scaling for wider uptake will likely take years. And even after all that, achieving 100% sustainability is challenging; with the exception of Mirum, bio-based leathers require a PU coating to prevent scratching.

Working with small startups can also be unpredictable. In 2022, Stella McCartney produced the world's first-ever Mylo luxury handbag made from mycelium, the rootlike system of fungi, but Mylo recently halted production because it wasn't able to fundraise enough. Other materials can be impractical: her collaboration with startup Radiant Matter on biodegradable sequins led to Cara Delevingne wearing a Stella McCartney–designed BioSequin jumpsuit on *Vogue*'s April 2023 cover—but each fragile sequin had to be hand-stitched. And other non-PVC sequins lack the color range of traditional ones. "I get driven and angry," McCartney says of the limitations she faces compared with her peers. "But these are the kinds of things that make me want to get up in the morning."

The results, she feels, are worth it. Her Winter 2023 collection includes a version of the brand's iconic Falabella made from Mirum, as well as over-the-knee boots made of Vegea, derived from wine-grape waste, and faux-crocodile handbags made from AppleSkin, a by-product of juice and jam production. There's a particular thrill McCartney feels when customers have no idea that they're buying shoes made from grapes, or a blouse made of regenerative cotton. "We can win if there's no sacrifice on a dream," she says, "on desirability, on luxury, on escapism."

DESPITE HER SUCCESS, McCartney still has her detractors. She tells me several times that she is not perfect and that her brand isn't either. Though she has a focus on reusing stock and waste material, she's still in the business of making new products—though it's unlikely an $1,100 Mirum handbag would be thrown out quickly. "My solutions aren't there price-point wise," McCartney says, noting that she encourages her four children to buy secondhand clothing at charity shops over fast fashion. She also has a sportswear collaboration with Adidas. "I'm a firm believer in less is more. Buying luxury—something made well, that is a timeless design—is an investment, and now there are businesses that support resale and rental." (Stella McCartney was the first official brand partner of luxury consignment site The RealReal.)

The Stella McCartney Womenswear Winter 2023 show in Paris in March

There's also the question of how feasible it is for McCartney to really make change within LVMH. CEO Arnault may have praised McCartney's values, but just a few months after their deal, he publicly criticized climate activist Greta Thunberg for "surrendering completely to catastrophism." Ever since her early days at Kering, McCartney has been accused of getting into bed with the fur-wearing, leather-toting enemy—something she describes as "infiltrating from within." She has a history of success: in 2010, she banned the use of the notoriously toxic PVC at her label, a move later adopted by all Kering brands, from Saint Laurent to Balenciaga. Industry norms may be stubborn, but McCartney says the work at LVMH has been exciting and rewarding. "If I can have a seat at that table—where the decisions are still made—I want to be there. I'm pleased to say it's not just bullsh-t."

The partnership with LVMH, she says, is already yielding results. McCartney's Summer 2023 collection includes a T-shirt made from 100% regenerative cotton, a first in luxury, emblazoned with a blue "Snog a Log" graphic—a classic example of what Wintour calls McCartney's "wonderfully tongue-in-cheek sense of humor." Since 2019, the brand has been working with Soktas, a family-owned cotton producer in Turkey, to help it transition away from conventional cotton farming, which uses harmful chemicals to control pests and boost production. The regenerative-cotton project started with 5 hectares and grew to 55 in 2022, her team says; LVMH has now taken over the Soktas funding, which will further expand the project.

That helps keep McCartney going. But behind it all is a drive to connect with consumers through her clothes. She considers fashion a service industry. When she's working on a collection, she's thinking about how a Stella McCartney–designed piece should make you feel: confident, comfortable, alive, effortless, sensual. "I want to feel the best version of myself," she says, her eyes lit up. "I want to feel f-cking fabulous." —*With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN/NEW YORK *and* ARMANI SYED/LONDON ◻

STEPHANE CARDINALE—CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES

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THE HEALING SEA

In a quest to preserve the zones that let oceans thrive, ecologist Enric Sala heads for the South Pacific

By Aryn Baker

Sala, founder of Pristine Seas, ***explores a Palau reef in 2014***

PHOTOGRAPH BY MANU SAN FÉLIX—
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PRISTINE SEAS

Enric Sala—marine ecologist, conservationist, and ocean advocate—is standing under a life-size replica of a Northern Atlantic Right Whale at the natural history museum in Washington, D.C.,

and the air outside is smudged with wildfire smoke drifting down from Canada. It's not surprising that Sala wants to talk about the smoke, or about whales. Their poop, however, is an unexpected twist. According to Sala, whale excrement, or, more precisely, the lack of it, has a role to play in the choking miasma that has forced my interview with one of the world's foremost ocean explorers indoors instead of out on a boat.

It may seem like a stretch, the kind that relegates environmentalists deep into woo-woo territory, but as our conversation unfolds, it starts making sense. Whale poop fertilizes ocean plankton. The plankton reproduces rapidly, absorbing carbon dioxide as it photosynthesizes sunlight. Eventually it sinks to the seafloor, trapping the planet-warming gas in layers of sediment. Fewer whales means less plankton sequestering CO_2, leaving more in the atmosphere. That means more of the heat driving the wildfires that have smoked out much of North America.

"Suddenly, we're seeing that the impacts of climate change are not something that is going to be suffered by somebody else," says Sala. "It's here." And so it is, in the wildfires, heat waves, and floods that have made the weather of summer 2023 some of the most extreme on record. Greater biodiversity, whether it is found in the ocean's whale populations or the old-growth forests that also store carbon, can help mitigate the effect of burning fossil fuels much more cheaply than any new technology, he says. "The more nature we have, the more nature will be able to absorb our impacts."

Sala's links between healthy ocean ecosystems and human benefits like carbon sequestration are backed up by science that he has either committed to memory or conducted himself. But it's the ability to break scientific complexity into simple concepts that even landlubbers can comprehend that makes him so effective as an ocean advocate, helping rally global governments to commit to protecting 30% of their coastlines and ocean territories by 2030. His Pristine Seas project, sponsored by the National Geographic Society, has identified dozens of the ocean's most biodiverse hot spots in an effort to call for their protection. Already he has managed to get 2.5 million sq. mi. (6.5 million sq km) of coastline and ocean set aside in 26 marine protected areas (MPAs)—an expanse twice the size of India—where fishing, dumping, mining, and other destructive industries are prohibited.

On May 24, Pristine Seas' scientific-research ship the *E/V Argo* lifted anchor for its most ambitious undertaking yet: a five-year expedition to the remote tropical Pacific, where Sala plans not only to chart the world's biggest ocean from its unplumbed depths to its more familiar shores, but also to document the complex links between marine ecosystems and the lives they support on land in order to build a case for their conservation.

The ocean needs that help more than ever. The morning of our meeting, the European climate-monitoring agency reported that May 2023 had seen the highest ocean temperatures on record, increasing ocean acidity, weakening marine ecosystems, and forcing coral polyps to expel their colorful symbiotic zooxanthellae algae in a near-death phenomenon called bleaching. By the end of July, waters off the coast of Florida had reached Jacuzzi temperatures, and volunteers were racing to transfer fragile coral sprouts to indoor aquariums before they cooked to death. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), about 40% of the world's oceans are currently experiencing a marine heat wave, with as much as 50% forecast for September.

The ocean has already absorbed more than 90% of the planet's greenhouse-gas-fueled warming, explains Sala, "but it will not be able to absorb our impacts

for much longer without serious consequences."

The havoc wreaked on coral reefs destroys habitats that nurse, nourish, or shelter a quarter of all marine life, including the fish that provide critical protein and income to a billion people around the world. Goods and services provided by reefs in the form of tourism, shoreline protection, food, and fisheries are valued at $2.7 trillion a year. The economic consequences of reef loss are grim and looming ever closer, says Sala. A 2°C or higher rise in average global temperatures since humans started burning fossil fuels for energy would be enough to wipe out an estimated 99% of existing coral reefs. The month of July already averaged 1.5°C. "I find that I am rarely invited back to dinner parties," he deadpans.

Still, says Sala, there is hope. His research has proved again and again that given the space to recover undisturbed from human exploitation, nature can bounce back. "A marine protected area cannot make that water cooler, cannot protect from warming, but what we know is that fully protected areas are more resilient." He has watched pristine reef systems, bleached white by marine heat waves, recover within five years—but only when they have their full cohort of predators like sharks, along with the smaller inhabitants they prey upon. A reef, he says, isn't just made up of coral. It is a delicately balanced ecosystem that includes bacteria, algae, plants, clams, crabs, urchins, herbivores, and the carnivores that keep them all in check. Take one element out, and the entire system becomes unstable. "You board a plane, and the pilot informs you that five screws are missing, but you don't know from where. Would you still fly?" he asks.

'The more nature we have, the more nature will be able to absorb our impacts.'

—ENRIC SALA, OCEAN CONSERVATIONIST

Sala's solution for protecting the ocean from rising heat is simple: identify the richest areas of biodiversity and protect them from human intervention. Left alone, the resulting abundance will eventually spill over into unprotected zones, stocking new areas with fish that can be harvested for human consumption, while allowing for the evolution of genetic adaptation to a changing climate. MPAs, says Sala, are like an interest-bearing savings account. As long as you don't touch the principal, you can live off the interest. "The only way to get more from the ocean is to have more life in the ocean," says Sala. "And the only way to have more marine life is to set some places aside so it can thrive. It's as simple as this."

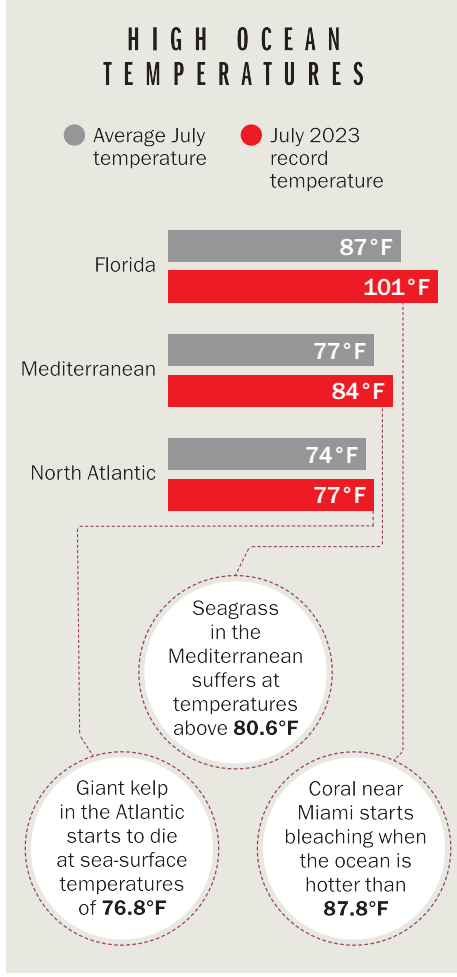
As an avid snorkeler growing up close to the near barren waters of Spain's Costa Brava, Sala always assumed that the lush, underwater gardens of his favorite Jacques Cousteau documentaries could be found only in faraway tropical paradises. A chance scuba lesson in the Medes Islands marine park, one of Spain's first MPAs, taught him that the Mediterranean could be just as much an underwater wonderland when it was protected from the region's industrial fishing fleets. "Everything that was missing from the sea of my childhood was there," he recalls. "The grouper, the sea bass, the scorpion fish, octopus, sea bream."

That epiphany sparked an interest in marine conservation, and, with a Ph.D. in ecology, he went on to help establish the Center for Marine Biodiversity and Conservation in 2000 at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, in La Jolla, Calif. But despite his tenured position, generous research grants, and the opportunity to work with the best ocean scientists in the world, he felt something was missing. "The places that I was studying were falling under the force of the relentless human sledgehammer," he wrote in his 2020 memoir, *The Nature of Nature: Why We Need the Wild*. "Corals and seagrasses were dying everywhere, and fish were being taken out of the water faster than they could reproduce. Lush underwater gardens full of large animals were being turned into dead reefs overgrown by brown algae and murky jellyfish dystopias . . . I realized that all I was doing was writing the obituary of ocean life." He felt, he says, like a doctor telling his patient how they would die, without offering a cure. So he quit, and went in search of one.

Pristine Seas was inspired by a *National Geographic* story about an explorer who trekked across central Africa and persuaded the President of Gabon to create a chain of national parks to protect the region's wildlife. Sala wondered if the same could be done for the oceans. In 2007, Sala approached the National Geographic Society with a proposal to

combine exploration, research, policy, and documentary film to build a case for local governments to establish national marine protected areas. He envisioned Pristine Seas as a kind of scientific SWAT team, refining our understanding of ocean life, by sending divers, submersibles, and cameras into waters previously unplumbed by research, and working with economists, ecologists, and climate scientists to calculate the value of preserving what they found.

Since 2008, the program has conducted 38 expeditions, produced 30 documentaries, and published more than 250 peer-reviewed studies that have upended long-held assumptions about marine ecosystems, including the power of highly protected areas to rapidly restore depleted fish, coral reefs, and kelp forests in adjacent waters. In a 2021 paper for *Nature,* Sala demonstrated that protecting 30% of the ocean would also deliver benefits for commercial fisheries and carbon sequestration. He identified key areas that, if protected, would provide the most benefit in terms of nature conservation, food production, and climate mitigation, a kind of more-bang-for-your-protection-buck checklist that he is now trying to persuade local governments to implement. Overall, Pristine Seas has helped midwife a total of 26 MPAs into existence, raising the percentage of protected ocean from 1% to 8%.



That's still significantly less than the 30% that scientists say is necessary to protect ocean biodiversity. Sala visibly flinches when reminded of that shortfall, and acknowledges the pressures piling up since he started 15 years ago, from a quadrupling of plastic waste to higher temperatures and increased fishing pressures. "Now I'm working on the cure, but the patient is getting worse and worse," he concedes. "We fix the lungs. But oh, now there's something wrong with the liver. Oh, and there is a blood clot. So yeah, it's a Sisyphean task. But that's what makes me keep going. I don't see a bigger purpose than working to save life on earth."

In a 2009 expedition to Kiribati's Southern Line Islands, a chain of uninhabited atolls 1,800 miles southwest of Hawaii, Sala found reefs that had never seen pressure from commercial fisheries, a "thriving coral jungle full of large fish." Before then, he says, scientists "had no idea what pristine reefs looked like." In 2015 and 2016, disaster struck. A marine heat wave triggered coral bleaching in more than half the reef. Sala thought he was witnessing the destruction of one of the ocean's last intact coral colonies. But a return visit in 2022 demonstrated a "miraculous" recovery. Coral was growing back, and the fish were as plentiful as they had ever been. "It recovered like a phoenix," says Sala.

Documenting the reef's recovery wasn't enough. Sala wanted to understand why those coral survived the heat, when so many other reefs did not, and how that recovery could be replicated elsewhere. Sala theorized that small grazing fish had kept the bleached coral free of the brown algae that usually takes over, enabling the coral polyps to regain their zooxanthellae and start growing again. In June, Pristine Seas returned to the area in one of the first stops of its new Pacific expedition, in part to test Sala's hypothesis. Was it the presence of large numbers of fish? Or because larvae from other, less affected corals were able to

take root among the ruins? Had the surviving corals evolved some sort of heat resistance? "If we believe that high protection is a key ingredient for coral resilience, we need the data," he says.

One of the most effective components of Sala's Pristine Seas expeditions is the opportunity to offer a front-row seat for the ocean's underwater marvels to the people who can make a difference. "We take Presidents, Ministers with us. They come out of the submarine saying, 'This was the most transformative experience of my life,'" says Sala. Once they make the emotional connection, Sala presents them with the economic case for protection, and the policy proposals that help them sell it to their people. After going out with Pristine Seas in 2022, then Colombian President Iván Duque more than doubled the country's marine protected areas, bringing it within reach of the 30% goal, and joining forces with regional neighbors Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Panama to establish the largest protected marine zone in the western hemisphere, if not the world.

It is this combination of action-oriented research and passionate advocacy that has enabled Sala to be so effective, says Jennifer Jacquet, a fisheries researcher and visiting professor of environmental science at the University of Miami, who has co-authored papers with Sala. "He is someone who understands that advances in science are incremental, and that actually the most urgent problems are social ones that require politics and policies and advocacy, things that many scientists don't feel comfortable with."

'I don't see a bigger purpose than working to save life on earth.'

—ENRIC SALA

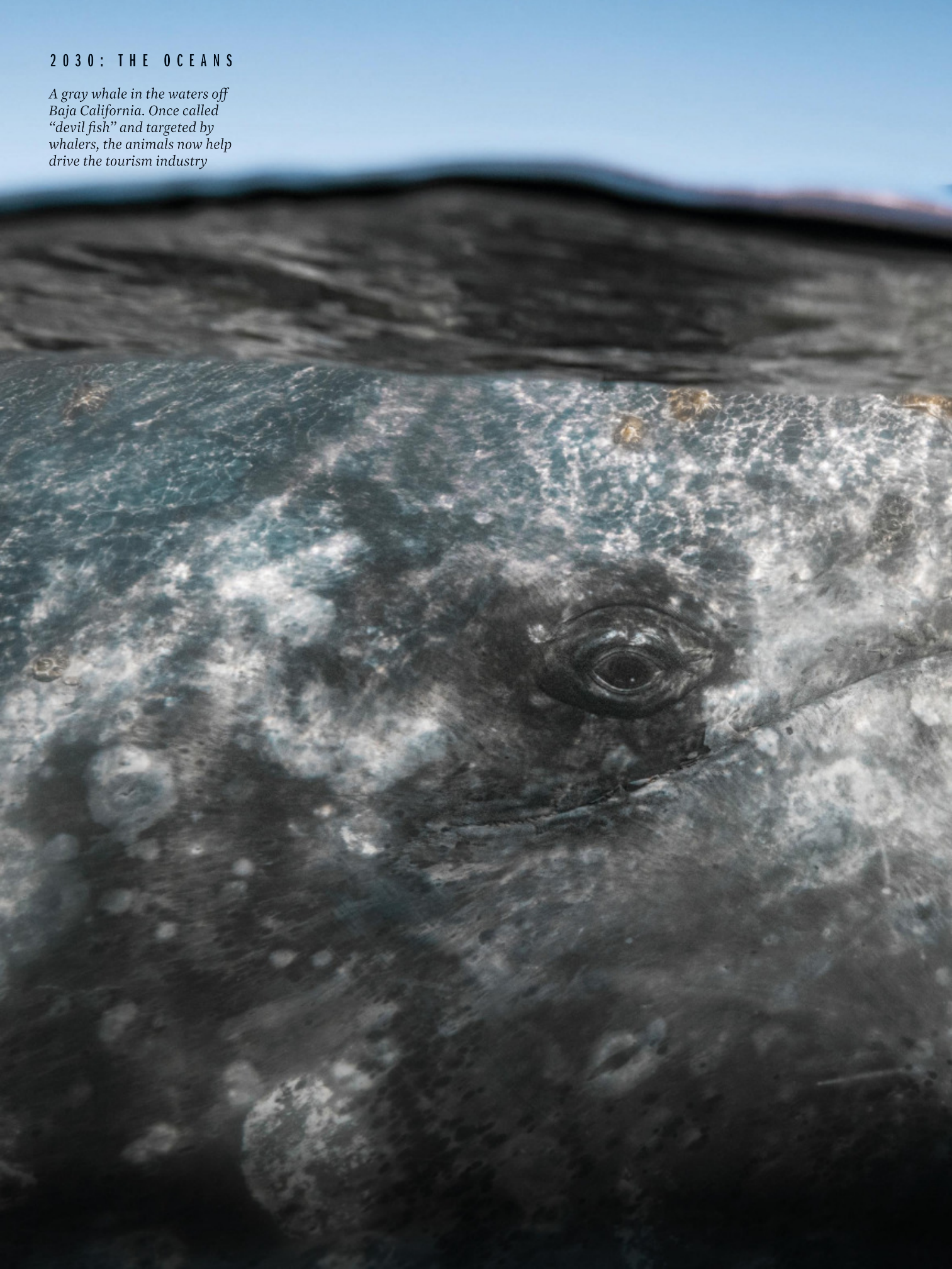
Equally at ease slipping into a wet suit on the deck of the *E/V Argo* as he is networking in a shirt and tie at Davos, Sala has a passion that is infectious—and incredibly effective at captivating the people who have the most power to protect our oceans: government leaders. Jane Lubchenco, a marine ecologist who led NOAA from 2009 to 2013, and a co-author on the *Nature* MPA paper, recalls watching him present his early findings to a panel of Norwegian lawmakers in 2018 to help rally support for a global commitment to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030. Going in, says Lubchenco, "they were dead set against it," convinced that MPAs would harm the country's lucrative fishing industry. But as Sala spoke, "you could feel the tone of the room change," she says. "Before they had been told that they had to choose between fisheries and biodiversity, or between climate-change benefits and food security. His message was that if you use science to pay attention to where these hot spots are, you can actually maximize all."

Nobel Foundation executive director Vidar Helgesen, as Norway's then Minister of Climate and the Environment, had invited Sala to present. "Enric's impressive presentation—and not least his case that protection actually increases fishery volumes—served to strengthen the hand of those supporting protection and weaken the resistance of others," he says. Norway went on to support the 30% target, and as chair of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, encouraged other countries, including fishing stalwart Japan, to follow suit.

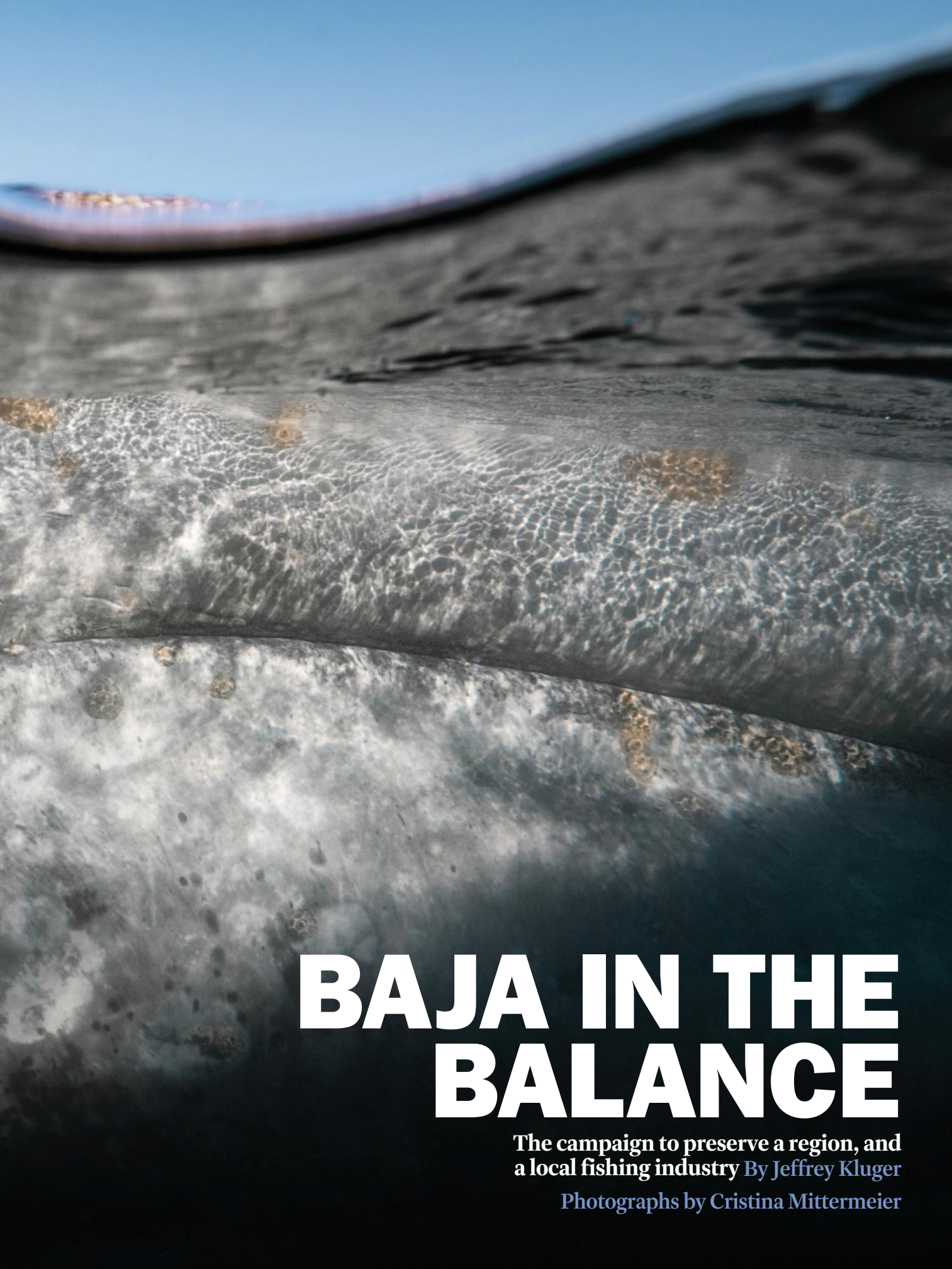
More than advocacy, more than science, Sala's key sales point for ocean protection is hope. As fish stocks dwindle and ocean temperatures rise, Sala offers a solution that doesn't even require a sacrifice, just an adjustment. It's a potent antidote to the endless parade of doomsday scenarios that dominate today's climate conversations, says Lubchenco. "Offering an option to protect and restore the vibrancy of ocean ecosystems is very attractive because people can actually see there's something they can do."

Could such a policy be applied to the whole of the Mediterranean? Sala pauses in front of the exhibit of sea fan coral, a species that is all but gone from his old snorkeling grounds off the coast of Spain. His face flickers with emotion as he imagines what a protected Mediterranean would look like. "Before you get in the water, you will see monk seals on the beach," he says. "[There would be kelp] forests 60 meters deep. Lots of fish, including very large groupers, starfish, and shrimp, and lots of lobsters. And octopuses, more of everything," he whispers, before anchoring himself back into reality. "The Mediterranean of the future is not going to be like the Mediterranean of the past." For one, it's warmer than it used to be, and invasive species have made it a permanent home. "But we can still make sure it's better than it is now. We just have to leave enough of it alone." —*With reporting by* SIMMONE SHAH ◻

SOURCES: NOAA, CLIMATE CHANGE INSTITUTE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE, NATIONAL DATA BUOY CENTER, MEDITERRANEAN HEAT WAVES MONITORING SERVICE, THE KELP RESCUE INITIATIVE, AND STUDIES PUBLISHED IN THE REGIONAL STUDIES IN MARINE SCIENCE, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION, NATURE. CREDIT: RICH MORGAN



A gray whale in the waters off Baja California. Once called "devil fish" and targeted by whalers, the animals now help drive the tourism industry

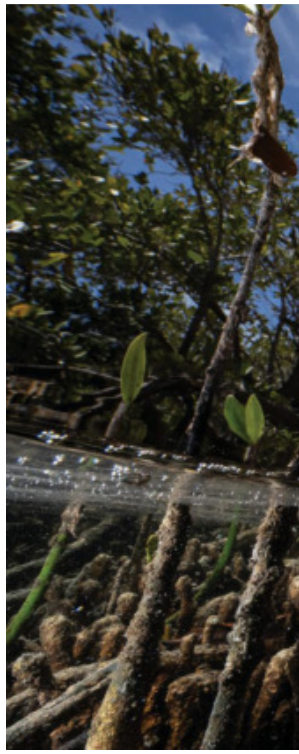


BAJA IN THE BALANCE

The campaign to preserve a region, and a local fishing industry By Jeffrey Kluger

Photographs by Cristina Mittermeier

Clockwise from top left: a sea lion swims through a dangerous fishing area; mangroves in Baja, which absorb more carbon than any other tree; a whale shark off La Paz, Mexico; artisanal fishermen with a horse mackerel



IT'S EASY TO SPOT THE SMALL, FAMILY-OWNED fishing boats that ply the waters around Baja California—a peninsula 1,223 km (760 miles) long that represents the westernmost part of Mexico. There are 24,000 of the vessels, after all, and they spend much of their time at sea—as well they might if the so-called artisanal fishermen are going to compete with the vastly larger industrial vessels that fish the same waters. The average artisanal boat measures 24 m (79 ft.) from bow to stern, compared with the industrial vessels, which can easily exceed the length of a football field, at 130 m (427 ft.). And the industrial vessels are equipped accordingly—with nets that measure 600 m (1,968 ft.) across, and baited lines that may stretch 45 km (28 miles) long.

"There's a huge level of injustice there," says Cristina Mittermeier, a photographer, marine biologist, and co-founder of the U.S.-based ocean-preservation group SeaLegacy, which is partnering with the Mexico-based group Beta Diversidad to address environmental and economic problems around Baja California. "The industrial fishing fleet is owned by billionaires and subsidized by the government."

The kind of megafishing the industrial boats do leaves a huge environmental footprint. Up to 96% of the population of bluefin tuna in the region are gone, for example. For every 2.2 lb. of shrimp pulled from the ocean, there are more than 20 lb. of unwanted bycatch—mostly juveniles of various species. The nets drag along the bottom of the ocean, damaging the delicate ecosystem of the ocean floor, and releasing the carbon that's sequestered in the sediment.

It's not just the industrial fishing boats that are making a mess of these waters. It's tourists too. "Ecotourism" generally has a benign sound to it, conjuring up images of respectful whale watchers looking for the great creatures from quiet boats, idling at a distance. But things aren't nearly so peaceable. "Unregulated tourism affects species like whales, orcas, marlins, sea lions, and dolphins, thanks to overcrowding of boats with no permits," says Mario Gómez, president of Beta Diversidad.

"There can be 30 boats chasing one orca," says Mittermeier. "I was in one of those boats 15 years ago … All of the whale sharks [we saw] had propeller marks on them."

But there's a fix for all of this—with historical precedent. In 1995, the Mexican government, pressed by local activists, created the Cabo Pulmo National Park on the southeastern tip of Baja California—covering both land and a portion of the offshore region. Cabo Pulmo once saw much of the devastation that the rest of Baja California is suffering. But not anymore.

Industrial fishing is prohibited, and ecotourism is heavily regulated. The result has been a 465% increase in the population and diversity of fish in the local waters and a recovery of the region's damaged coral reef. In 2005, Cabo Pulmo was named by the U.N. as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

"It became such a famous place," Mittermeier says. "And now people are saying, 'Oh, we need more Cabo Pulmos.'"

SeaLegacy and Beta Diversidad, along with other environmentalists, are working to make that happen, leading a movement to create a protective zone that will fit like a sock over the southern half of Baja California—where the peninsula's greatest biodiversity is found—extending into the waters of the Gulf of California to the east of Baja and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Some sport and artisanal fishing will be allowed near the coasts, and a tightly regulated ecotourism industry, but no industrial fishing. Farther out into the ocean will be a "no take" zone that will leave part of the Pacific and the Gulf of California entirely untouched.

"The tension really is to preserve the traditional way of life of fishermen and preserve the economic activity of tourism but with a regulation framework, so that it's not a free-for-all," says Mittermeier.

Beta Diversidad, SeaLegacy, and other environmental advocates plan to present their proposal in a formal request to Humberto Adán Peña Fuentes, Mexico's Commissioner of Natural Protected Areas. It would be up to Fuentes to approve the request and then pass it on to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who has the power to designate or deny the marine reserves.

"In the case of this designation, the most important group to protect are the artisanal fishers, because their livelihood is fully impacted," says Gómez. "That is what really triggers the commissioner's interest."

The advocates are hopeful—but time is short. Mexico's presidential campaign begins in November, with the election taking place next June. Environmentalists expect Fuentes to make his recommendation to López Obrador near the end of the year, and in turn expect López Obrador to make his decision shortly after.

Until then, the matter of Baja California remains very much open to question—and that leaves supporters of a protected zone committed to telling the tale of their effort as widely and loudly as possible. "I'm supporting this with all I have because humanity needs it," says Mittermeier. "Without stories, the ocean dies in silence." ◻

A school of Mobula rays off Baja California. Each spring the rays arrive in the area to mate. That's a risky proposition because entire schools of the animals can get caught in nets intended for bass and snapper

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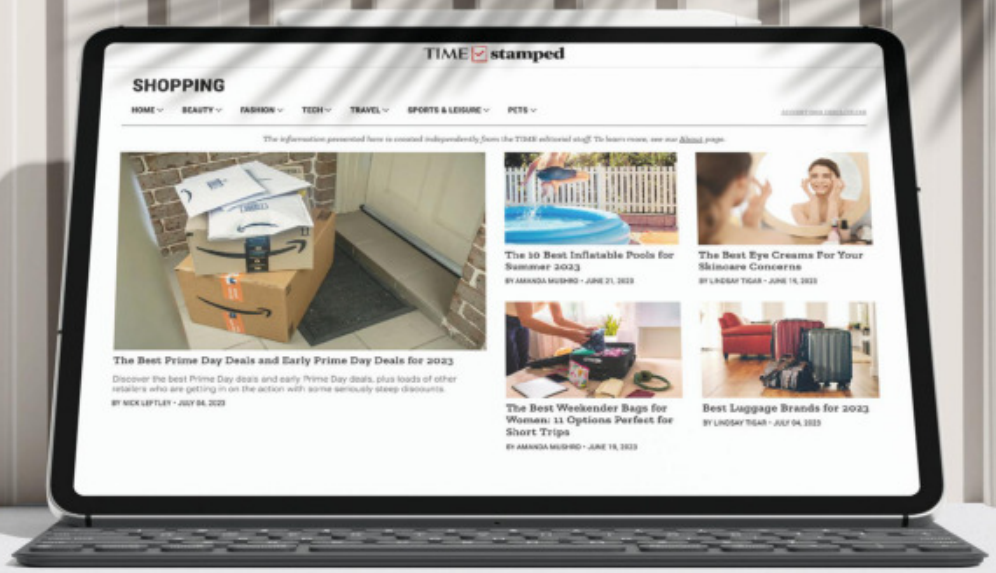


Time Off

THE NEW ROMANTICS

BY JUDY BERMAN

A decade after *Fifty Shades*, pop-culture romance has become alarmingly wholesome

INSIDE

GEN Z GETS ITS OWN WOMAN-LED RAUNCHY COMEDY

A DAZZLING NEW DOCUMENTARY ON LITTLE RICHARD

WHAT IT WAS REALLY LIKE IN THE *FRIENDS* WRITERS' ROOM

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY TIME

ONCE UPON A TIME, IN A UNIVERSE MUCH LIKE our own, the United States of America had a female President with a son named Alex Claremont-Diaz. When Alex met Henry, a British prince, it was mutual rancor at first sight; down-to-earth Alex thought Henry a snob, and haughty Henry thought Alex an ill-mannered commoner. This antipathy escalated into an international incident that climaxed in a giant cake toppling and burying them under layers of fluffy icing. Fast-forward through a handful of publicity stunts designed to sell the public on their friendship, and the two young men are hopelessly, hornily in love. But neither is openly queer. If you're worried this is all destined to end in heartbreak (and geopolitical catastrophe) then you probably aren't familiar with Casey McQuiston, who dreamed up the scenario in their hit 2019 novel *Red, White, and Royal Blue*. Now back on best-seller lists in anticipation of a frothy new adaptation on Prime Video, *Royal Blue* is emblematic of a new generation of love story that has conquered pop culture. I call it wholesome romance.

Decorated with cute illustrations, wholesome-romance covers leap out from bookstore displays in gummy-candy hues. Whether shelved as contemporary romance, YA, or new adult, these buoyant books take place in more idyllic versions of our reality, full of gentle humor and happy endings. The stakes are low, the people kind, the sex scenes vanilla. And the books, like *Heartstopper* (based on Alice Oseman's comic), which just dropped its second season on Netflix; and Amazon's *The Summer I Turned Pretty,* whose author Jenny Han's YA romances have fueled three movies and two TV series since 2018, are getting snapped up by Hollywood. The sensibility has breached the romance-novel-to-rom-com pipeline and spilled over into literary fiction, reality TV, podcasts.

Unassuming as they may be, the titles represent a dramatic shift in the fantasy lives of their mostly female audience. The multiplatform romance (and adjacent) juggernauts of the recent past, from *Twilight* and *The Fault in Our Stars* to *Fifty Shades of Grey,* seduced fans with bloodsucking dreamboats, BDSM billionaires, and terminally ill teens. Now, when we immerse ourselves in a love story, fewer of us seem to be seeking that frisson of danger. What has become more exotic, and thus more desirable, is comfort, safety, stability. That our collective daydreams now seem so healthy and achievable is not necessarily a sign of progress.

NO STORY EPITOMIZES this new sensibility like *Beach Read,* the breakthrough novel by erstwhile YA author Emily Henry. Published two months into COVID lockdown, the book hinges on the classic rom-com trope of enemies to lovers. After the sudden death of her father and a bad breakup, romance writer January Andrews moves into the secret beach house that her seemingly perfect dad used for an affair. She's got all summer to deliver a new manuscript but can no longer bear to write tidy love stories. Then she realizes her next-door neighbor is an old college rival who has grown up to be an acclaimed literary novelist. They fall in love, brought together by the challenge to swap genres for the summer.

Beach Read—like Henry's subsequent novels, including 2023's *Happy Place,* now in its fourth month on best-seller lists—has all the elements of a comforting romance. The characters are normal humans, albeit attractive ones with glamorous careers, who have familiar problems. The reader-surrogate female narrator is independent and outspoken. The setting, a Michigan beach town, is beautiful but not ostentatious. The ratio of witty banter to explicit lovemaking is high.

Henry and many of her peers play to their audience by writing the stories they treasure into the book. (There's a whole subgenre of romance novels about people who love to read and write, including Henry's *Book Lovers.*) Like Laura Jean in Han's *To All the Boys I've Loved Before,* January was a romance reader first; she discovered the genre when she picked up a paperback in the waiting room of her cancer-stricken mom's radiologist. "Mom's first diagnosis taught me that love was an escape rope," she recalls, "but it was her second diagnosis that taught me love could be a life vest when you were drowning."

That life raft is a booming business. After a lockdown bump, and as the genre continues to trend in the corner of TikTok known as BookTok, *Publisher's Weekly* reported a precipitous 52.4% increase in romance-book sales in 2022. This summer, romances by Hannah Grace, Ali Hazelwood, Ann Napolitano, Taylor Jenkins Reid, and publishing powerhouse Colleen Hoover dominate best-seller lists. A new streaming adaptation of a wholesome romance seems to pop up weekly, from Netflix's take on Katherine Center's

What has become more exotic is comfort, safety, stability

novel *Happiness for Beginners,* whose premise is more or less *Wild* as a rom-com, to Paramount+'s *Love in Taipei,* a breezy new adult romance based on a YA novel by Abigail Hing Wen.

BUT THE WHOLESOME-ROMANCE sensibility isn't just a sales trend within an isolated niche. Nor is it simply the latest incarnation of the rom-com, which both entails a more specific format and allows for more variation in tone. It's about our society's shifting orientation toward romance, regardless of genre. The yearning for grounded love stories about regular, well-intentioned people with relatable goals—marriage, professional achievement, maybe kids—has become evident across narrative art forms, from highbrow novels to lowbrow reality TV.

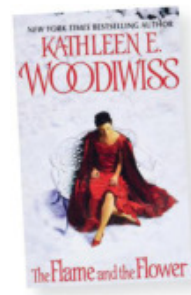
Compare the Netflix smash *Love Is Blind* with the waning grande dame of dating shows, *The Bachelor.* While the latter is a glittering fairy tale of courtship, the former throws a couple dozen millennials into isolated "pods," where they seek potential mates sight unseen. Before they can gaze deep into each other's eyes, cast members establish compatibility by comparing values, ambitions, religious beliefs, desires to procreate. Vicarious indulgence in the minutiae of other people's relationships is a trendlet unto itself; Showtime's *Couples Therapy* and Esther Perel's hit podcast *Where Should We Begin?* are two voyeuristic options. In this year's breakout indie romance, Celine Song's *Past Lives,* a young woman must choose between a childhood friend from Korea and the American man she married. In the end, she makes the safe decision.

Some of the biggest recent literary novels have riffed on the tropes of the wholesome romance. Irish author Sally Rooney became an international sensation with books that contrast romance and friendship with the everyday misery of 21st century capitalism—and posit love as an imperfect refuge. (Rooney's *Normal People* and *Conversations With Friends* were swiftly adapted into Hulu miniseries.) The genre-hopping Nigerian writer Akwaeke Emezi articulates this idea in their acclaimed 2022 romance, *You Made a Fool of Death With Your Beauty.* "I think we're just figuring out how to survive a world on fire . . . that it's okay to be alive," says Emezi's heroine, Feyi. A young widow, she witnessed her husband's car-crash death and has denied herself love and pleasure since. But Feyi is also an avatar for anyone struggling to feel truly alive at a time when COVID and war and opioids and climate crisis make us all, if we're lucky enough to survive, witnesses to large-scale death.

ROMANCE, LIKE SCI-FI and fantasy, has always promised an escape from reality. But reality has rarely felt as chaotic as it has since the norm-shattering election of Donald Trump and a deadly pandemic, as violent backlash to the Movement for Black Lives, feminism, and LGBTQ liberation accelerates. Romance once offered audiences an escape from daily doldrums by exploiting extremes of emotion and experience in what were essentially adventure stories.

It wasn't until the Sexual Revolution had swept through youth culture that romance novels got explicit about sexuality. The so-called bodice ripper was born in 1972, with Kathleen E. Woodiwiss's *The Flame and the Flower*—which follows an 18th century maiden who falls for a ship captain who kidnaps and ravages her. Erica Jong's feminist sex romp *Fear of Flying* and Bernardo Bertolucci's embattled *Last Tango in Paris* followed. Around the same time, *Deep Throat* took porn movies mainstream. By the Reagan '80s and the Clinton '90s, as economic prosperity helped cloister Middle America from the tragic fallout of epidemics like AIDS and crack, erotic thrillers from *Body Heat* to *Cruising* needled the collective subconscious about infidelity, queerness, female empowerment. The blockbuster romance franchises of the early 21st century, *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades,* put regular girls at the mercy of powerful men who hurt them.

While *Twilight* traced its roots to the brooding romances of the Brontës, wholesome romance has more in common with Jane Austen's light, witty novels of smart women and the difficult men who love them. Which might explain why Shondaland's Regency romance *Bridgerton,* based on Julia Quinn's blockbuster books,



The first "bodice ripper," published in 1972

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY TIME; SOURCE IMAGES: NETFLIX (2)

Twilight, *top, and* Bridgerton *are as different as the Brontës and Jane Austen*

became a phenomenon when it debuted on Netflix over the lonely pandemic holidays of 2020—and why writer-star Joel Kim Booster used *Pride and Prejudice* as a guide for his splashy gay rom-com *Fire Island* in 2022. More than anything, though, this wholesome-romance moment reminds me of the vogue for screwball comedies in the 1930s. With the Great Depression raging, Americans scrounged pennies to watch beautiful people flirt. The sequins, nightclubs, and Deco roadsters represented a lifestyle that suddenly no longer seemed attainable to the salaried masses.

THE CHARACTERS in Netflix's *Heartstopper* are teenagers wise beyond their years. One night, closeted rugby star Nick (Kit Connor) apologizes for failing to come out as bisexual at a party when he'd promised Charlie, his openly gay boyfriend, he would do so. Charlie's response—that he doesn't owe his coming out to anyone—sounds like the kind of thing a person who had been through therapy would say. But this sort of talk is a lingua franca for the sensitive teens and young adults who populate these romances.

Mental health is central to the wholesome romance's fantasy of safety, as manifested in relationships built on emotional intimacy. Like Charlie, who once faced bullying after being outed, many of the protagonists in this otherwise cheery subgenre have trauma in their past. This is where these stories overlap with Hoover's wildly popular, darker romances. In her biggest hit, *It Ends With Us,* flower-shop owner Lily meets irresistible lothario Ryle hours after her abusive father's funeral. But when Ryle becomes violent, she finds the courage to leave. Instead of eroticizing abuse, as early bodice rippers did, Hoover's novel (soon to be a movie starring Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni) is built around the dream of breaking a destructive cycle even if its compassionate portrait of Ryle can come worryingly close to justifying his behavior.

Hoover notwithstanding, many of these romance narratives also diverge from the straightness and whiteness that have suffused the vast majority of mega-mainstream romances in the past. In the wholesome romance love isn't just a refuge from old trauma or contemporary cataclysms. It's also a safe space for characters—and audiences—who regularly experience sexism or racism or homophobia. Published midway through Trump's term, *Red, White & Royal Blue* projects that same sense of security into the political sphere, imagining a Democratic female President (along with a Black, female British Prime Minister) who loves her queer son.

In many ways, the wholesome romance is an encouraging trend. But I'm not convinced it says anything positive about the state of the world. Escapism is not meant to be rational; on the contrary, it's a means of imagining the impossible. It's no coincidence that 50 years ago, the powerful gains of the women's movement—culminating in *Roe v. Wade*—coexisted with romances that often placed female characters in positions of powerlessness. What's taboo becomes titillating. Women who devoured the violent "rape sagas" of the '70s were not lining up to be sexually assaulted. *Twilight* fans did not actually want to have their bodies ripped asunder by a super-strong fetus with a vampire for a father.

The great recycling center that is American pop culture in the 21st century has, inevitably, endeavored to bring back the steamy, scary, kinky entertainment of generations past. Yet erotic-thriller auteur Adrian Lyne's 2022 comeback, *Deep Water,* was unintentionally funny more than exhilarating; Paramount+'s attempt to reimagine Lyne's *Fatal Attraction* fell disastrously flat. On the heels of five years' worth of Me Too revelations, Hollywood's conflation of love with predation no longer seems so exotic.

What we want instead are gentler, less stressful romances. And the more popular they become, the more that popularity looks like a red flag for society at large and female audiences in particular. Why would anyone need to escape into a story where lifestyles are comfortable, relationships are respectful, women are financially independent, and mental health is paramount if that was already their reality—or even an achievable goal? It isn't such a wholesome thought. ◻

TWILIGHT: TEMPLE HILL ENTERTAINMENT/ALAMY; BRIDGERTON: NETFLIX

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REVIEW

Girls just want to have fun, yet this feels like work

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

THERE'S ALWAYS SOME WAY TO reinvigorate an old genre, and anybody with the energy and imagination to do so should try. In Emma Seligman's *Bottoms,* gay misfits and best friends PJ (Rachel Sennott) and Josie (Ayo Edebiri) face their last year of high school with a typical teenage longing: they desperately want to lose their virginity before graduation. They're gawky, socially inept. The objects of their affections, unfortunately, are cheerleaders who want nothing to do with them, lanky, blasé Brittany (Kaia Gerber) and sweet, adorable Isabel (Havana Rose Liu), who's under the thumb of the school's bullying, numbnuts football star Jeff (Nicholas Galitzine).

How many times have we seen some version of that scenario, only with gawky teenage boys as the protagonists? *Bottoms* reverses that equation at the start, and then pushes further. In a stunning and mildly amusing lapse of logic, PJ and Josie decide their best chances at getting laid lie in starting a self-defense club at school, which rapidly devolves into a teenage Fight Club: the young women let loose, punching one another out and getting a kick out of it. Chaos reigns, and jokes about bulimia, gray-area rape, and the emptiness of empowerment slogans fly as freely as the punches. Somehow, in the middle of it all, Josie actually gets a chance at romance with Isabel, who's slowly beginning to see that her domineering beau isn't all that. And PJ just may have a shot with Brittany, who states pretty definitively that she's straight.

But who knows? There's always hope.

It should all be hilarious, bloody, sweet, transgressive fun—but it isn't. *Bottoms* was written by Seligman and Sennott, the director and star, respectively, of the 2020 indie comedy *Shiva Baby,* whose unassuming brand of humiliation humor was its finest asset. Sennott played an aimless young woman who agrees to show up at a funeral observance with her parents, only to learn that the older guy she's sleeping with *and* her ex-girlfriend are both in attendance as well; calamity ensues during Kaddish. *Bottoms* is a bigger, more ambitious picture, designed to challenge and tickle a broader audience. But it works so hard at delivering shock value that its calculation becomes wearying. *Bottoms* spells out its themes in all-caps pep-rally lingo: Women can be raunchy! Women can be horny! Women can make jokes about all the things we aren't supposed to laugh about! Even in a case, like this one, where excess is the point, comedy still depends on an indefinable subtlety. *Bottoms,* though it presents itself as a sort of sideways heir to comedies like *Heathers* and *But I'm a Cheerleader,* simply runs its jokes into the ground.

Edebiri, Sennott, and fellow pugilistic misfits

It should all be hilarious, bloody, sweet, transgressive fun

SENNOTT AND EDEBIRI—the duo behind Comedy Central's *Ayo and Rachel Are Single,* from a few years back—pedal hard to drum up the laughs, and occasionally a gag lands. Their best scene may be the opener, in which they lament their lack of hotness with a world-weary resignation that somehow churns into a whirlwind of let's-give-it-one-more-try energy. Edebiri in particular—she has also appeared on *The Bear*—has a kind of loopy charm. But one of the actors who has the least to do may be the funniest. Gerber's Brittany is a leggy supermodel type played by an actual supermodel, and there's a good sport lurking beneath her cool-girl veneer. "I do *not* talk to girls in overalls," she purrs dismissively as she gives sartorially challenged PJ the once-over. It's an example of how a comedy's silliest, most throwaway lines can often work better than the ones designed to score points.

If only *Bottoms* had more of that throwaway casualness. We can always use comedies that turn the old conventions inside out, opening space for new faces and fresh ideas. But you can't buck the system just by kicking its ass; retooling the old formulas means working smarter, not just harder. As the plot's ridiculousness accelerates, culminating in a goofy bloodbath that's not nearly as bloody or goofy as it needs to be, *Bottoms* becomes less and less funny, and no amount of macho-sexy roughhousing can make it work. ◻

The architect of rock 'n' roll: beautiful inside and out

REVIEW

The man who was everything, and then some

IN A NATION TORN APART BY, OF ALL THINGS, the perception that drag performers will corrupt our children, the time is right for a documentary about the glitter king himself, Little Richard, a performer who broke all kinds of boundaries at a time when doing so could be life-threatening. Lisa Cortés' *Little Richard: I Am Everything*—which premiered at Sundance and will make its television premiere on CNN on Sept. 4—tells the life story of the man who was born Richard Wayne Penniman in 1932 Macon, Ga., the son of a minister and nightclub owner who disapproved of his son's flamboyance. But Cortés, using clips from Penniman's performances and appearances on TV talk shows, gives us something much more than your standard biographical documentary. She uses Penniman's story to map America's conflicted feelings about its own racial, religious, and sexual identity, and to celebrate the freedom he bestowed upon us—freedom that he wanted us to have, even if he sometimes didn't allow himself to enjoy it.

Penniman, one of 12 children born to a mother he adored, had always loved performing. In church, he tells us in voice-over, "they wouldn't let me sing that much, because I wouldn't stop." His stern father knew the truth about his son's sexual orientation and made his life miserable. But as a teenager Penniman found a haven in a Macon speakeasy called Ann's Tic Toc, and joined a touring circuit that allowed queer performers, and marginalized audiences, to flourish. In those early days, Penniman himself performed in drag, and it wasn't long before he'd carved out an image for himself as a wickedly handsome dazzler in sparkly suits, his hair a sky-high pompadour swoop, his pencil mustache adding a touch of old-Hollywood elegance to what was an otherwise revolutionary and totally modern look.

The many moods of Little Richard

THE ORIGINAL LYRICS of Little Richard's first hit, the 1955 R&B showstopper "Tutti Frutti," are essentially unprintable; as written, the song was an ebullient ode to a certain sexual practice. But even after the words were cleaned up, the song remained transcendent in the very dirtiness of its sound. It's one of the greatest anthems of unapologetic selfhood ever written, announcing, "Little Richard has arrived!" When Penniman crowed about having invented rock 'n' roll—and Cortés includes plenty of instances of his glorious, over-the-top braggadocio—he wasn't even bragging. Elvis Presley himself, knowing there was no contest, acknowledged Little Richard as the true king.

Yet as wholly confident as Penniman was, he had his moments of self-doubt, and Cortés maps them out with compassion. In 1957, after suffering what he believed to be a near-death experience aboard a flight from Melbourne to Sydney, Penniman renounced his homosexuality—a state of being he'd always been open about—and decided to devote his life to God. But he couldn't stay away from his true calling forever. Eventually, he returned to the rock 'n' roll flock, though over the years—until his death in 2020—he often struggled to reconcile his faith with his sexual orientation. That complexity, Cortés makes clear, is part of Little Richard's legacy. He was a child of God, always, taking whatever blessings came his way and passing them along to us, often in a shout so raw and so joyous that there was never any risk of mistaking its true meaning. —S.Z.

BOTTOMS: ORION PICTURES; LITTLE RICHARD: I AM EVERYTHING: MAGNOLIA PICTURES (4)

ESSAY

Writing for *Friends* was no joke

BY PATTY LIN

EVER SINCE I RETIRED FROM TELEVISION WRITING AT the ripe age of 38, people have asked me, "Why would you quit such a cool career?" It's impossible to answer this question over cocktail-party conversation. Where would I even begin? There were the grueling hours, the egotistical bosses, the dysfunction—there's everything the Writers Guild of America is currently fighting against with their ongoing strike, and the issues have only gotten more complex since I left in 2008.

My disillusionment had begun at my very first writing job but was momentarily staved off by a positive experience at *Freaks and Geeks*. Then came *Friends*. When my agent told me the *Friends* team wanted to meet with me, I was stunned. It was America's most popular sitcom—and I had been writing for only two years. But somehow, after a grueling, eight-person interview, I got the job.

MY FIRST DAY, in July 2000, was a nerve-racking blur. The staff had 14 writers, which was large, but this show had a big budget and high expectations. Five of the writers were women. I was the only minority. (NBC had just launched a diversity program, and the network was making efforts to hire more writers of color. On principle, I support affirmative-action policies. But in practice? It's a major mindf-ck. You can't tell if they want you for your talent or your race.) The creators, Marta Kauffman and David Crane, took us all to an Italian restaurant for the "annual welcome lunch," which had the forced feeling of Thanksgiving dinner with relatives you don't like. In all of my fears about the new job, I never predicted the writing staff would be so cliquey. They reminded me of the rich kids in my high school who drove brand-new convertibles.

Each 12-hour day started in a giant conference room. At 10 a.m. people would trickle in, then we'd break into two teams to work on separate episodes. David would always lead one room and Marta the other. I was scared of them both, for different reasons. David, an impossible-to-please workaholic, was always looking for a better line or joke. Marta had a booming voice and would rest her bare feet on the table while we worked. Our chitchat was always tense. (Kauffman and Crane declined to comment.)

There was a lot of sitting around in silence, and a lot of irrelevant chatter, mostly about sex. That year a former writers' assistant had launched a lawsuit against Warner Bros., claiming that sexually explicit talk made the *Friends* writers' room a hostile workplace. It's true that the sex talk was pervasive. The California Supreme Court would rule that talking about sex did not constitute harassment, and that for an "adult" comedy that revolved around sexual themes, it was necessary for the creative process.

Harmless, maybe. But necessary? I remember exactly one time details about our sex lives were used on the show, in "The One With Rachel's Book," where Joey finds an erotic novel that Rachel uses to get off. Mostly we talked about sex just to amuse ourselves. I was proud of my ability to laugh at obscenities and not take offense, but I'd probably feel differently today.

After each script was done, we'd have a table read where the cast would read it aloud in front of the producers, writers, executives, and various department heads. This served three purposes: (1) for the actors to judge the script (so they could gripe about it later), (2) for the showrunners to decide what needed to be rewritten, and (3) for the lead writer of the episode to feel both bloatedly important and sickeningly self-conscious. At first, I was excited about table reads because I got to be in the same room as Big Stars. Plus, there was a catered breakfast buffet. But the appeal of both wore off fast—there were too many competing egos in the room.

Next was the first rewrite, then a run-through on the set. Then everyone would sit around Monica and Chandler's apartment and discuss the script. This was the actors' opportunity to voice their opinions,

Lin on the set of Friends *in December 2000, playing one of the angry neighbors in "The One With All the Candy"*

which they did vociferously. That was occasionally helpful, but overall, these sessions had a dire, aggressive quality.

The run-throughs were followed by more rewrites. We worked into the wee hours, endlessly rewriting stuff that was funny the first time. I tried to contribute, but my strength was fixing story problems—not pitching jokes. Sometimes I'd think of a line I could picture Chandler or Phoebe saying to hilarious effect, but I'd wreck the pitch because I was so nervous. Being surrounded by elite comedy writers had eroded my self-confidence.

Being surrounded by elite comedy writers had eroded my self-confidence

We would finally tape the show on Friday night. While sitting in the audience of a sitcom starts out fun, it ends up feeling like the longest night of your life. After six hours of watching the same scenes over and over, the crowd would no longer be laughing, which sent David and Marta into a tizzy. Between takes, the writers would huddle around them to pitch new jokes when the ones in the script didn't get a big enough laugh. And when I say big enough, I mean uproarious—the kind that's impossible to elicit without the element of surprise.

These huddles were by far the most stressful part of the job, because David only listened to pitches from his three go-to joke writers. The one time I ever got a line in was in the Christmas episode "The One With All the Candy," where Monica makes holiday treats to put out for the whole apartment building. When Chandler asks her why, she says, "We can learn their names and get to know our neighbors." Chandler's response, as written in the script, did not garner the side-splitting laughter required. The go-to guys pitched some alternate lines, all met by David's silence.

Then I pitched, "Wouldn't it be easier if we just moved?"

Marta let out a full-throated laugh, which in that moment was the most wonderful sound I'd ever heard. David seemed unconvinced, but there were no other pitches he liked, so Marta got her way and I got a joke in.

That also happened to be the episode in which I was tapped to be an extra, playing one of the angry neighbors stalking the hallway. David Schwimmer, who was directing the episode, came over to give instructions. "Patty, can you scooch closer to the door?" he asked. I scooched, thrilled that instead of saying, "Hey you," Schwimmer addressed me by name. That night was the high point of my *Friends* experience. For once, I felt like I had something to do with the show.

I ONCE HEARD the writers refer to the act of telling people they wrote for *Friends* as "dropping the F-bomb"—a way to instantly impress people. But I had no desire to drop the F-bomb, because presenting myself as a *Friends* writer felt fraudulent and just kind of wrong.

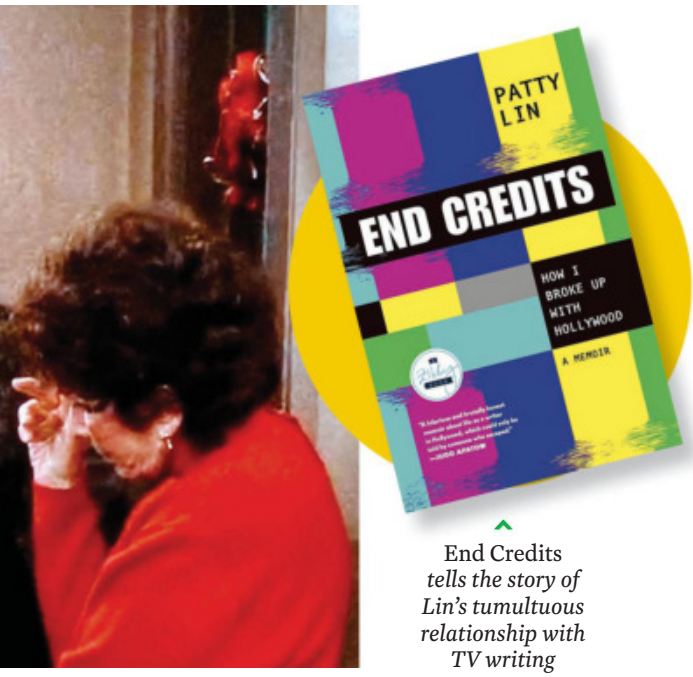
For a long time, I justified these feelings because I was a drama writer working in comedy. And yes, that was part of it. But impostor syndrome, I later learned, is a common experience for racial minorities who work in fields where they lack representation. As the only Asian writer in many rooms, I felt so alone, buckling under the pressure to represent my entire race and prove that I deserved to be there. When the season wrapped in the spring of 2001, I was delirious with exhaustion. *Friends* had an option on me, which meant that if they wanted me back, I had to do it. But soon after we wrapped, my agent called. "I want to warn you before David Crane calls," he said. "They're not picking up your option."

I didn't even try to act surprised. "Did he say why?"

"They need a joke writer for next year."

Thinking of all those times I felt invisible in the huddle, I was mortified. But I was also a little bit relieved. No more all-night rewrites, no more anxious joke pitching, no more feeling like a nerd at the popular kids' table. That said, it still sucked to be dumped. I found out later that one of the other new writers had also been fired. I have to admit it was a comfort that I wasn't the only one, and that they'd also fired a white guy.

In the end, I didn't learn that much, except that I never wanted to work on a sitcom again. But *Friends,* for better or worse, would forever be my most recognizable credit.



End Credits *tells the story of Lin's tumultuous relationship with TV writing*

Lin is the author of End Credits, *from which this essay is adapted*

CHINA WATCH
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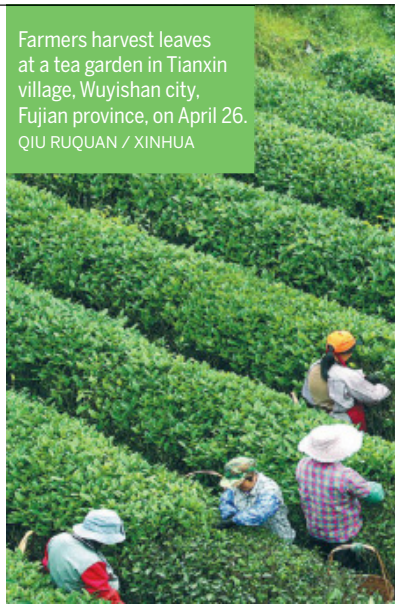
National park supports sustainable tea sector

Scientific advances on land use are helping to protect the environment



Farmers harvest leaves at a tea garden in Tianxin village, Wuyishan city, Fujian province, on April 26.
QIU RUQUAN / XINHUA

BY HU YUMENG

The Wuyishan National Park, renowned for its breathtaking landscapes and revered tea industry, has taken significant steps to safeguard its traditional tea heritage and industry, while embracing technological advances to empower farmers and raise the incomes of local people.

Home to one of China's largest and most diverse subtropical forests, Wuyi Mountain is the only place in the country where Wuyi rock tea is grown.

"Wuyi rock tea, known for its mineral-rich floral aroma, possesses a distinctive and crucial fragrance that comes from the unique soil and rocks of the region," said Huang Shengliang, an inheritor of China's national-level intangible cultural heritage of Wuyi rock tea craftsmanship. "Only tea planted in our rocky soil can produce such a distinctive taste."

With tea cultivation dating back over 1,000 years, the mountain's tea industry has a rich history. The area has been providing tea for people at home and abroad since the first century, and in the 18th century, Wuyi rock tea was the most popular tea in Europe.

Workers spread out freshly plucked tea leaves to dry them before further processing on May 7 last year.
JIANG KEHONG / XINHUA

However, its popularity was gained at a cost to the local environment. Illegal land reclamation of tea mountains and the destruction of plant resources have occurred frequently, damaging the environment in the area around Wuyi Mountain.

The need to strike a balance between farmers' livelihoods and the local environment has emerged as a unique challenge for the Wuyishan National Park, which covers 316,300 acres as it straddles the eastern provinces of Fujian and Jiangxi. It was established in 2021 as one of the first batch of China's national parks.

The park authorities said the facility has a tea cultivation area of 8,535 acres, accounting for 2.7% of its total expanse.

The authorities have cooperated with tea experts to devise a holistic strategy for the protection and improvement of the Wuyi Mountain tea industry and biodiversity, ensuring the sector's sustainability for generations to come.

Since 2018, two years after the Wuyishan National Park pilot program was launched, about 4,940 acres of illegally reclaimed tea mountains had been reforested, including more than 1,410 acres within the park's boundaries.

Despite restrictions preventing local growers from expanding existing cultivation areas or using new parcels of land, the park remains committed to supporting the local tea industry and improving the farmers' lives.

Now, though, the emphasis has shifted toward sustainable tea cultivation practices, including optimizing existing plantations and improving the

Reaching out through theater

BY YANG XIAOYU

Imagine that on your first trip to a foreign country as a teenager you are tasked with performing a play for a local audience in their language. Give this thought 5 to 10 seconds, and you may already be sweating bullets, or find that your heart is thumping in your throat.

But 15 girls aged between 12 and 17 from Montana and California managed to pull off this daunting task in Beijing, leaving their audience awestruck and moved, as they staged their first performance of *Chinese Mermaid*, a time-honored Chinese children's play, on July 15 at the China National Theater for Children, kicking off the 12th China Children's Theater Festival.

The show's success is the result of more than a year of training and rehearsals, according to Chen Suhan, director and producer of the play.

In the summer of 2020, Chen and her team proposed to the China National Theater for Children the idea of inviting U.S. students who are interested in the Chinese language and culture to perform *Chinese Mermaid*.

The play follows the story of a kind, brave and tenacious boy who spends his life doing everything he can to deliver on his promise to rescue a kindhearted girl who has been kidnapped and turned into a mermaid, and restore her legs.

It created a sensation following its debut in 1981, prompting comic books to be made from stage photos of the performance. In 2015, the theater revived the play with modern stage design and has since put on over 70 performances.

"It embodies traditional Chinese aesthetics and values such as being kind and honoring one's commitments. As these are universal values that resonate easily with children from other cultures, we accepted Chen's proposal," said Feng Li, president of the China National Theater for Children.

Chen's choice of working with the Rocky Mountain Ballet Theater in Montana, the U.S. host of this project, led to the decision to incorporate ballet into the U.S. version.

Founded in 1998 by Charlene Carey, the RMBT offers young people training in ballet and performance, and organizes cultural exchanges. The company has long-standing ties with China and, in 2008, it visited for the first time, bringing a group of 48 dancers and students on a two-week tour to China. It has since visited many times, participating in art festivals in many cities, including Xi'an, Shaanxi province,

quality of Wuyi rock tea.

By prioritizing quality over quantity, the farmers can maintain their market competitiveness while safeguarding the environmental integrity of Wuyi Mountain.

"In order to better protect the forest, we must respect and preserve the existing areas for the locals to plant and live on, but further expansion has been restricted," said Huang Zhimin, a researcher with the park's management bureau.

"However, existing tea growers and merchants can continue their operations because we prioritize the livelihoods and well-being of the local community."

Embracing sustainable agricultural practices is at the core of improvement efforts for the park's tea industry. Growers are encouraged to minimize the use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers, and employ organic and natural alternatives to protect the ecosystem and consumers' health.

Eco-friendly terraced plantations that use the "tea forest" and "tea grass" models have been introduced to the park. Moreover, the authorities provide farmers with free seedlings of precious broad-leaved trees such as nanmu, yew and ginkgo, which encourages intercropping with tea bushes. This practice not only protects local biodiversity, but also improves the quality of the tea by providing natural shade for the leaves as they grow.

To improve the quality of both soil and tea, an eco-friendly approach has been adopted on the farms in which tea is interplanted with soybeans and rapeseed.

The Wuyishan National Park's authorities have been working with tea experts to improve production and quality through the use of innovative technological methods.

Since the 1990s, more than 1,000 special sci-tech experts have been sent to Fujian to support local agriculture.

Liu Guoying arrived in the first batch. "What I have done in recent decades is help farmers and businesses improve the quality of the tea," said Liu, who is a household name in the area for his expertise in the production of Wuyi rock tea.

"Our team works closely with the farmers, teaching them how to manage tea plantations effectively and refine their tea-growing skills. By raising the overall quality of our tea, we can command higher prices, which boosts profits for the farmers."

Yang Wenchun, a local tea farmer, said: "In the past, we lacked knowledge of scientific tea field management, which resulted in teas of average quality that were only suitable for basic daily consumption.

"Now, we have embraced scientific approaches. During the summer, we plant soybeans which helps improve our overall productivity. As a result, the quality of our teas has risen significantly and they are proudly served to honor esteemed guests and cherished companions in pleasant social interactions."

Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

A scene from the performance of *Chinese Mermaid* featuring U.S. teen performers. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Shanghai and Chongqing.

"This was a great collaborative project, specifically designed for our group of young American artists and academics. We were very pleased with the results," said Carey, artistic director of the play.

Chen and the company began auditioning actors in California and Montana three years ago.

"Our first audition in Los Angeles attracted nearly 200 students. Then we held two more auditions in San Francisco and Montana," said Chen.

Around 30 students were cast, most of them interested in dance and theater, but only 15 made the cut after eight rounds of training and selection, according to Chen.

As most of the actors did not speak Chinese, learning to understand their lines and roles was the first challenge. Authorized by the China National Theater for Children, Chen and her team condensed the script and made the lines shorter and simpler.

Shortly after their last full-cast rehearsal in Missoula in June, the 15 girls and their teachers arrived in Beijing on July 5.

On July 15 and 16, the play was performed twice to a packed theater. Nearly 500 students attended the matinee on July 16 and met the cast to talk and exchange ideas on a number of topics.

Even though the U.S. version of the play is the first classic the China National Theater for Children has authorized a non-Chinese organization to stage in its 68 years of existence, the theater has promoted youth cultural exchanges between China and the U.S. for many years.

In 2015 for example, it invited the Missoula Children's Theater to participate in the 5th China Children's Theater Festival, during which Chinese and U.S. students performed *The Princess and the Pea*, a classic children's play, in English. The following year, eight U.S. students performed excerpts from *Idiom Cube*, a play based on Chinese idioms, in Chinese.

Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.

Jill Lepore The Harvard historian on her new book of essays, *The Deadline;* the catastrophe of social networks; and why she hated *Barbie*

Some of the essays in your new anthology are quite personal. In one, you write about having to hide your motherhood duties as a scholar and about having a miscarriage. What made you decide to reveal such personal moments? That essay—which is the title of the collection—I wrote on the 20th anniversary of the death of my best friend, who died while I was giving birth to my first child.

My friend Jane knew how much I wanted to have a baby and had been with me through all of those early struggles, including the miscarriage. When I was pregnant, she was diagnosed with leukemia, and she made this kind of crazy pact with herself and with me that she wouldn't die until the baby was born. It was an expression of love and also her way of taking care of me. How could I possibly erase a detail that explains the momentous decision that this person I really love had made?

Another essay gets into the history of Barbie. Have you seen the film? I hated the film.

Why? To pretend that a story about peddling plastic Barbie dolls for a giant international corporation is a story of feminist liberation is unbearably sad to me. It's a bizarre, creepy love letter to tyranny and capitalism. One of the essays in my collection, which is called "Valley of the Dolls," is about the intellectual-property battle between Mattel and the manufacturer of the Bratz dolls.

How will future historians describe this period we're living in? Future historians will be AI, so they'll write some very boring history. I'm not the person who says you must wait 50 years. The last essay in this collection, which is called "The American Beast," is my reading of the Jan. 6 insurrection committee report. Historians have an obligation to make sense of what's going on in the present within the absolutely explicit and abundantly confessed constraint that we don't know enough right now and we will know more later. That's why I do what I do, because I believe we have an obligation to try to make sense of the relationship between today and yesterday.

Was there a moment growing up that inspired you to become a historian?

I had my Italian grandmother teach me how to make meatballs. I do not speak Italian, and she did not speak English. I cannot record what she knew. I'm fascinated by the loss of knowledge and the obligations of historians to recover archives.

Is there a historical figure or event you think would make a great movie? I've heard there's this really good biography of Jane Franklin. [Benjamin Franklin's sister; Lepore wrote it.] She gets pregnant at 15, marries the boy next door—who I believe had raped her, and what you had to do when you got pregnant was marry the rapist. She had 12 children with that guy, who ended up in a lunatic asylum. She was poor her whole life. That is what ordinary life in the 18th century is. It's not the story that Benjamin Franklin tells us in his autobiography. He erased her from the story of his life because it's inconsistent with his allegory for America that he wants to make out of the story of his rags-to-riches life.

Are you on Facebook or Twitter? No.

Why not? Back to your question about future historians, I think [the social networks] will be looked on as having been fairly catastrophic. Facebook's business model is to monetize loneliness. I don't want to participate in any way in that business model. If tobacco companies had some great, fun, free thing that was seemingly free, but was actually selling tobacco products to children, I also wouldn't buy that.

—OLIVIA B. WAXMAN

WEBB CHAPPELL—GUARDIAN/EYEVINE/REDUX

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