

"All the News  
That's Fit to Print"

# The New York Times

VOL. CLXXV .... No. 60,746

© 2025 The New York Times Company

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2025

Prices in Canada may be higher

\$4.00

## Top Leaders Fuel a Surge In Falsehoods

### A Traditional Restraint on Rumors Fades

By STEVEN LEE MYERS

Rumors flew in the hours after a shooting at Brown University killed two students on Dec. 13. One falsehood had it that one of the victims, a leader of the college Republican Club, was "targeted for her conservative beliefs, hunted, and killed in cold blood."

Another was that it had been a terrorist attack, a claim that made the rounds when a Palestinian student was identified as a possible suspect two days later and found on the internet.

A churn of disinformation after a major news event is hardly a surprise anymore, but its spread after the Brown killings was not limited to the dark fringes of the internet. It was fueled by prominent figures in business and government whose false statements or politically charged innuendo compounded public anger and anxiety.

That has raised new alarms about the nature and quality of public discourse — and whether there is any consequence for those who degrade it or for the social media platforms that reward it.

Renee DiResta, an associate research professor at Georgetown University, referred to the attacks on the falsely accused student as "an internet witch hunt," where the rumor mill intersected with a political propaganda machine.

"Political leaders, statesmen, who once served as a firebreak against baser instincts increasingly see an opportunity to look receptive to the base — so they add kindling instead," she wrote in a newsletter on Substack on Tuesday.

Those who spread rumors about the motives behind the shooting included at least two members of Congress, Senator Tommy Tuberville of Alabama and Representative Anna Paulina Luna of Florida, both Republicans. The assistant attorney general for civil rights at the Justice Department, Harmeet Dhillon, called the falsely accused student's political activism "concerning."

Bill Ackman, the billionaire owner of the Pershing Square hedge fund, amplified that narrative, as did Shaun Maguire, a partner at Sequoia Capital who has drawn attention recently for public statements about Islam.

"Our elite universities have become terror breeding grounds," Mr. Maguire wrote, only days before the state police identified the attacker not as a terrorist but as a disgruntled scientist from Portugal. He was found dead on Dec. 18 in a storage unit in New Hampshire, according to the authorities.

The fevered, baseless speculation became so intense that police officials warned that it was disrupting their work.

"The endless barrage of misinformation, disinformation, rumors, leaks and clickbait were not helpful in this investigation," the superintendent of the Rhode Island State Police, Colonel Darnell S. Weaver, said after the student's name spread online. "Distractions and unfounded criticisms do not

Continued on Page A12



VINCENT ALBAN/THE NEW YORK TIMES  
New Yorkers and visitors have purchased 3.2 billion MetroCards over the past three decades. In 2026, they will be phased out.

## It Was Lighter Than a Token. Now It's Litter.

By DODAI STEWART

It was January 1994 and a local ABC News team was broadcasting live from inside the Whitehall Street subway station in Manhattan with substantial breaking news. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority had not run out of subway tokens, the newscaster assured viewers, but it was replacing them with "something called a MetroCard."

On Day 1, early reviews were positive.

"It's a lot lighter than carrying a lot of tokens," one commuter noted. "I think it's a great idea."

"More convenient," another said. "Less holes in my pocket."

Still, unlike with tokens or coins, the M.T.A., which oversees the subway and buses, had to patiently teach people how to purchase and use the MetroCard. And riders were slow to adapt. In 1996, two years after its debut, only 8 percent of the transit system's five million daily riders were using the card.

Three decades and 3.2 billion MetroCards after it was first issued, what once felt like cutting-edge technology has become outdated. Dec. 31 is the last day the MetroCard will be sold in New York.

New York City's transit system is in the final stages of transitioning to OMNY, a tap-and-go payment system. The MetroCard will still function for part of 2026, but its days are numbered.

The truth is, the MetroCard has felt old-fashioned for years, a relic of a predigital era. The first OMNY readers were installed in 2019, and by the end of 2020, the

Continued on Page A10

## Path to New Life Started in Locked Psych Ward

By ANDY NEWMAN

Lamar Brown was one of the people some New Yorkers instinctively flinch from on the subway.

Living with schizoaffective disorder, talking to himself and surrounded by trash bags full of his possessions, he would ride the trains for hours. He spent years living in the subway system and on the streets.

Early last year, he was spotted on a train in Midtown Manhattan, yelling and muttering, and paramedics took him to a hospital psychiatric ward. It was a trip he had made before, one that mentally ill, homeless New Yorkers made involuntarily more than

### State Program Tries to Shut Revolving Door for the Mentally Ill

1,500 times last year.

Typically, hospitals treat and medicate people like Mr. Brown, 40, for a few days or weeks, until they are temporarily stable enough to be discharged. Then they are released to a shelter, a safe haven (a shelter with fewer restrictions) or back onto the street. They often stop taking their medication and quickly lose the ground they gained at the hos-

pital and slide back into the depths of their illness.

This time, though, after three weeks in the hospital, Mr. Brown was not released. He was sent to a locked ward in a hulking state-run psychiatric institution on a small island off Manhattan. He spent more than seven months there, left last fall and has been stably housed ever since.

The program he was placed in is known as the Transition to Home Unit. It has a simple but daunting mandate, said Dr. Caitlin Stork, the psychiatrist who designed it.

It takes mentally ill men and women who have languished for years on the city's streets and sub-

Continued on Page A11



TOM JAMIESON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



GEORDIE WOOD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

### Pictures That Defined the Year in Arts

A coastal path between Margate and Broadstairs in Kent, the United Kingdom. Right, Liam Neeson in New York. Photographers offer impressions from some of their favorite shoots.. Pages C1-4.

## An All-Nighter in the Dorm Yields a Voting Map

By EDUARDO MEDINA

The laptop was cracked open well after midnight, as was a bottle of Sprite. Then, Daniel DiDonato, a college freshman, got to work.

But he wasn't pulling an all-nighter to complete his assignments at the University of Alabama. Instead, fueled by soda and an unusual teenage interest in the wonky workings of redistricting,

Continued on Page A12

### College Wonk Redraws Lines in Alabama City

he set out to create new legislative maps for State Senate Districts 25 and 26 in Alabama.

A legal fight over those districts in Montgomery, Ala., had been brewing since 2021, when plaintiffs filed a lawsuit arguing that

state officials had violated Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and created maps that effectively diluted the power of Black voters.

In October, a federal judge ordered that those districts be redrawn and invited the public to submit maps for consideration. It was widely expected that the selected map would come from the team that had redrawn the state's congressional districts in 2023, which in-  
Continued on Page A10

## From Olympian to Fugitive on Most Wanted List

By NORIMITSU ONISHI and VJOSA ISAI

The target was a drug trafficker turned F.B.I. informant who didn't stand a chance. As he had lunch with friends at a restaurant in Medellin, Colombia, a hit man in a dark hoodie sneaked up behind him and shot him five times in the head.

The man who had ordered the hit quickly received a photograph

### Snowboarder Accused of Being Drug Lord

of the body, the authorities said. He reshared it widely — boasting that he had killed "the rat." The man behind the killing, they said, was Ryan Wedding, a Canadian who rose to fame as an Olympic snowboarder two decades ago,

only to become what the authorities describe as one of the world's biggest drug lords. "El Jefe," as he was known, ran a drug-trafficking empire out of Mexico and was now one of the most wanted fugitives in the world.

The killing in Medellin in January of this year — detailed in a grand jury indictment in the United States, a State Department reward offer and two court docu-

Continued on Page A17

### BUSINESS B-5 Sears's Hopes Fell Short

Only five stores remain, with the end likely near for what was once the mightiest American retailer.

PAGE B1

### Data Center Surge in India

Megacities in southern India are attracting enormous investments to help build A.I. infrastructure.

PAGE B1

INTERNATIONAL A4-7

### Zelensky to Meet With Trump

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said a "broad agenda" would be on the table this weekend with President Trump in Florida.

PAGE A7

### Targeting the Scam Industry

Thai warplanes have bombed Cambodian compounds where people are forced to defraud others online.

PAGE A4

Continued on Page A10

SPORTS B6-9

### For the Love of a Place

After having a baby, the N.W.S.L. star Sophia Wilson is staying in Portland, her comfort zone.

PAGE B6

Continued on Page A10



TRAVEL C9-10

### Fresh Glimpse of California

With miles of beaches and scenic views, San Luis Obispo County emerges as a destination in its own right.

PAGE C10

Continued on Page A10

NATIONAL A8-12

### New York Mayor No. 111 or 112?

An arcane numbering system and the misplacement of a centuries-old official record have caused confusion on exactly where the next leader of America's largest city falls in its history.

PAGE A8

### Schmoozing on the Stoop

New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani's campaign encouraged door-knockers to ditch prepared scripts and instead engage voters in conversation.

Democrats are taking note.

PAGE A9

Continued on Page A10

Gail Collins

MAGAZINE



THIS WEEKEND



BUSINESS B-5

### Sears's Hopes Fell Short

Only five stores remain, with the end likely near for what was once the mightiest American retailer.

PAGE B1

### Data Center Surge in India

Megacities in southern India are attracting enormous investments to help build A.I. infrastructure.

PAGE B1

### THE WEATHER

Today, cloudy, light snow, storm accumulation 3 to 6 inches, high 32. Tonight, clearing, cold, low 20. Tomorrow, cloudy, snow, possible ice, high 36. Weather map is on Page B10.

## NIGERIA CLEARED AIRSTRIKES BY U.S. ON ITS TERRITORY

### ATTACKS ON ISIS CAMPS

### Analysts Question Claim Militants Are Singling Out Christians

By HELENE COOPER and RUTH MACLEAN

The Nigerian government said on Friday that it had cooperated with the United States in airstrikes the day before, targeting Islamic State militants inside its country in attacks that President Trump said were intended to stop the slaughtering of Christians.

The strikes on Thursday involved more than a dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles fired off a Navy ship in the Gulf of Guinea, aimed at insurgents in two ISIS camps in northwestern Nigeria's Sokoto State, according to a U.S. military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss operational matters.

Nigerian officials have disputed Mr. Trump's assertions that Christians are being targeted in their country. Still, they made it clear on Friday that they were on board with the airstrikes, which came after a phone call between Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Nigeria's foreign minister, Yusuf Tuggar, "around bilateral issues and military cooperation," according to Alkasim Abdulkadir, a spokesman for Mr. Tuggar.

Mr. Tuggar relayed the conversation to Nigeria's president, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who approved the strikes, Mr. Abdulkadir said. He added that Nigeria had provided American forces with intelligence for the airstrikes, which were "meant to deter further operations of bandits in that area," he said, offering a different tone from Mr. Trump's.

Mr. Abdulkadir said there were continuing conversations with the U.S. authorities about possible further action.

What the strikes in northwest Nigeria achieved was not immediately clear. Analysts are divided over whether the violent attackers in Sokoto, colloquially known as the Lakurawa, have links to the Islamic State's Sahel Province branch, which is mostly farther north and west, in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

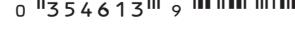
And analysts say that the Islamic State's influence in Nigeria is concentrated not in the northwest area that the Tomahawks struck, but in the northeast, where jihadist groups like the notorious Boko Haram and its now more powerful splinter, the Islamic State West Africa Province, have killed tens of thousands of civilians over the past decade.

Reports emerged on Friday that one area hit by the Tomahawks was the outskirts of Jabo, a Sokoto town that analysts said was not known to harbor any terrorist or bandit groups.

Shafiu Aliyu Jabo, 35, a Jabo resident, described in an interview hearing a strike in the middle of the night.

"We heard a booming sound like that of an aircraft, coming

Continued on Page A6



0 354613 9