# The Virginia history its state board doesn’t want students to know

Kevin M. LevinKevin M. Levin Is A HistorianEducator Based In BostonIs The Author OfSearching For Black ConfederatesThe Civil War S Most Persistent Myth.

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The Virginia Board of Education has delayed its review of state standards for history and social studies — a process that it is required to undertake every seven years. The nine-member board is now dominated by appointees of Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin, who campaigned on rooting out critical race theory from schools and offering parents an anonymous tip line to report anything they deem to be suspicious taking place in the classroom.  
  
This politicization of history education and the demonization of history teachers will probably have a profound impact on the now-delayed review. The 2022 History and Social Science Standards of Learning (SOLs) will shape what Virginia students learn about their Commonwealth’s past.  
  
Regardless of what the board approves as the final version, it won’t include one of the most important chapters in Virginia’s history. Just after Reconstruction, between 1879 and 1883, Virginia was governed by a biracial party known as the Readjusters. During this brief period, African Americans assumed positions of significant political power at every level of local and state government decades before the legal restrictions and violence of Jim Crow slammed the doors shut for decades. This history offers an important reminder during our own time of deep political division that political coalitions that transcend class, race and political party are possible even during the most tumultuous times.  
  
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Reconstruction came late to Virginia. It did not arrive as a result of an invasion of “carpetbaggers” from the North or military occupation, as Virginians were taught throughout much of the 20th century, but as an unlikely result of the leadership of a former Confederate general and native Virginian.  
  
William Mahone was born in 1826 to tavernkeepers in Southampton County. One of his earliest memories was the bloodshed and violence that erupted as a result of Nat Turner’s failed slave rebellion in 1831. In 1847, Mahone graduated from the Virginia Military Institute with a degree in civil engineering. By 1860 he was living in Petersburg and serving as the chief engineer of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad. Mahone also counted seven enslaved people as his personal property.  
  
At the start of the Civil War, Mahone was commissioned a captain in the Confederate army and gradually rose in rank, though he failed to distinguish himself on the battlefield. That changed early on the morning of July 30, 1864, after the U.S. Army detonated 8,000 pounds of powder under a Confederate salient just outside of Petersburg.  
  
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During the Battle of the Crater, four Union divisions, including one made up entirely of Black soldiers, poured into the breach in an attempt to break the Confederate line and take possession of the city. But Mahone and his division secured a decisive victory. Thousands of men lay dead and dying in the sweltering heat, including upward of 200 Black soldiers, who were massacred by the Confederates. These men were executed as “slaves in rebellion” by Mahone’s men rather than treated as soldiers or prisoners of war.  
  
After the war, Mahone remained involved in Confederate veterans’ activities, all the while taking steps to expand his railroad interests. He cultivated political allies in Richmond to manage what became known as the Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio Railroad. Following the financial collapse of 1873 and the loss of the railroad, Mahone entered state politics.  
  
The central political question for Virginian leaders at this time was what to do about the state’s massive debt, incurred even before the war. Conservative elements proposed paying it off in full, but Mahone and others advocated “readjustment downward” or paying off part of the debt, which would leave state funds for public schools and other projects. In the 1879 state elections, Mahone helped to steer his Readjuster Party to victory, winning 56 out of 100 seats in the House of Delegates and 24 of 50 senators. With a majority of Readjusters in the General Assembly, Mahone was elected to the U.S. Senate, where he caucused with the Republican Party. In the process, Mahone helped forge a powerful biracial coalition that controlled the state for the next four years.  
  
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With Mahone in the Senate and Readjusters in control of the General Assembly and the governorship, this coalition easily passed legislation. Virginia’s state debt was readjusted downward to $21 million, with enough funds left to fulfill campaign promises that benefited poor White and especially African American communities. In 1882, the General Assembly passed legislation supporting the Literary Fund with an appropriation of $379,000, plus an additional payment to public schools; schools with Black teachers were also given support. Not surprisingly, more-conservative Whites perceived this legislation as a threat to established racial and social hierarchies.  
  
Black political leaders such as Dr. Daniel M. Norton, Alfred M. Harris and the Rev. William Troy demanded a significant share of the patronage within the Readjuster Party. Norton and Harris were both formerly enslaved. At the height of Readjuster control, African Americans made up 27 percent of Virginia’s employees in the Treasury Department, 11 percent in the Pensions Bureau, 54 percent in the Secretary’s Office, 38 percent in the Post Office and 28 percent in the Interior Department (including two Black women). With Mahone’s support, African Americans also found jobs as clerks and copyists in Washington — an accomplishment unparalleled in other Reconstruction-era states.  
  
The visibility of African Americans in state government constituted a radical change in the distribution of political power and was seen by many as a threat to White political rule in Virginia. Readjusters also changed the makeup of public schools. The changes they enacted increased the number of Black teachers and students, and the establishment of the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (Virginia State University) opened up avenues of upward mobility. The number of Black teachers soared from 415 in 1879 to 1,588 in 1884, and Black enrollment in schools went from 36,000 to 91,000 between those years.  
  
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Mahone and the Readjusters abruptly lost power following a racial riot in Danville on Nov. 3, 1883.  
  
Two decades later, Virginians passed a state constitution that cut into what little remained of any Black political influence. Mahone died in 1895, leaving a conflicting legacy. White Virginians praised his service to the Confederacy, but many were unwilling to forgive his attempt to overturn its deeply ingrained racial hierarchy. The desire to move on from a brief period in which Black Virginians enjoyed full political rights and the need to justify a return to White control guaranteed that Mahone and the Readjusters would be banished from school textbooks and public memory.  
  
Students today learn nothing about this important chapter of Virginia history.  
  
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Even the proposed 2022 SOLs, which have been revised to “incorporate diverse perspectives,” do not cover it. As it stands, the state’s SOLs on Reconstruction ask students to consider the important work of the federal Freedmen’s Bureau, as well as the significance of the three constitutional amendments that ended slavery, guaranteed birthright citizenship and awarded Black men the right to vote. As for important people of the era, students are expected to be able to explain the “lasting impacts” of Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee and Frederick Douglass “on the nation.” Nothing in the state’s SOLs gives students a sense of the importance of Virginia’s experiment with biracial democracy.  
  
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This episode offers an important reminder that the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of legalized segregation during the Jim Crow era were not inevitable across the postwar South. Interracial cooperation was not only possible, it was a reality for a few short years in Virginia.  
  
The political posturing and fearmongering that have come to dominate the conversation surrounding history and social studies education over the past few years will probably shape the debate over the next set of SOLs for history and social studies in Virginia. Efforts to censor the teaching of American history will deprive students in Virginia and elsewhere of a complex and challenging historical narrative, the chance to find meaning in the past and the opportunity to engage difficult questions about race and inequality.  
  
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# Teacher quits in protest after being punished for banned-books sign

Jonathan Edwards

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Summer Boismier got through only one day of the school year before a parent complained and administrators descended on her high school classroom to investigate. Days later, she quit in protest of a new Oklahoma law that restricts teaching about race and gender. Wp Get the full experience. Choose your plan ArrowRight Even before the first day of the school year at Norman High School, Boismier suspected her personal classroom library would get her in trouble by running afoul of that law, so she covered her books with butcher paper. But she added a touch of defiance, scrawling a message in permanent marker across the paper.  
  
“Books the state doesn’t want you to read,” it said.  
  
Reload The toll of banning books in America 5:05 Cries to remove books from classrooms and library shelves is nothing new. Some of what has shifted are the storylines, characters and authors being silenced. (Video: Allie Caren/The Washington Post, Photo: Illustration: Brian Monroe/The Washington Post)  
  
Boismier, 34, included a QR code that her sophomore English students could scan with their phones, taking them to an application for a Brooklyn Public Library card. The site said that, even if they lived out of state, teenagers could still access materials as part of the library’s Books Unbanned project, “a response to an increasingly coordinated and effective effort to remove books tackling a wide range of topics from library shelves.”  
  
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Hours later, a parent complained to school officials about Boismier, accusing her of violating a new state law limiting public school lessons or materials that lead students to “feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress” because of their race or gender. The complaint thrust Boismier into the debate about the role parents, teachers and administrators play in deciding what to teach children, particularly when it comes to race and gender. Politicians in 35 other states are trying to restrict or have restricted education on racism, bias and related topics, according to Chalkbeat.  
  
Oklahoma’s law is particularly severe, The Washington Post reported. Teachers deemed to have violated the law can lose their teaching licenses.  
  
In the first half of last year, Boismier and her colleagues monitored the legislation closely as it worked its way through the Oklahoma legislature, worried “because essentially what it attempts to do is legislate feelings and legislate intent.”  
  
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Even though the new law took effect months before Boismier started her first year at Norman High, she told The Post that she mostly ignored it and taught as she had in her previous seven years in a classroom. Boismier said one of the most important parts of her job is to talk openly about the dark chapters of American history and how those shaped and continue to shape literature and identity.  
  
“I believe we need to have those difficult conversations,” she said. “That is absolutely essential to what I do.”  
  
But things changed late last month when the state Board of Education downgraded two school districts’ accreditations for violating the new law, Boismier said. The moves sent a warning to teachers in other districts across the state, she said.  
  
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“It was intended to send a message, and message received,” she added.  
  
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On Aug. 11, teachers in Norman returned to work from summer break eight days before classes began. Because of the new law and the “serious legal consequences for teachers and districts,” administrators told teachers to review their classroom libraries before the first day of school to “ensure age-appropriateness,” asking them to vouch for the works or “provide at least two professional sources verifying their appropriateness,” a district spokesperson told The Post in a statement.  
  
“We have not banned any books or told teachers to remove books from their classrooms,” spokesperson Wes Moody said in the statement. “Classroom libraries enrich our schools and we want our classrooms to be places where literacy thrives.”  
  
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Boismier said she was one of the teachers who asked for guidance on personal classroom libraries. She’d spent her own money to build hers into a collection of more than 500 books, many of the texts selected to broaden lessons beyond official reading lists she said are often stacked with works written by “mostly old, dead White guys.”  
  
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“That’s a way for me to supplement that and add in those more inclusive, multicultural texts that the curriculum, the reading lists that are official doesn’t allow for,” Boismier said, adding, “If you’ve seen it on a banned books list, I have made an effort to acquire it.”  
  
Referencing the bill that would eventually become the new law restricting classroom discussion on race and gender, she called her library “a physical manifestation of an HB 1775 violation.”  
  
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Teachers were asked to either box up the books that might trigger a complaint, turn them so their spines faced inward or cover them, she said. Choosing the latter option, Boismier got out the butcher paper to hide the books from the very students she would have lent them to in years past.  
  
She included the QR code along with a caption: “Definitely don’t scan this!”  
  
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Boismier told CNN that district officials said they felt the label on the QR code made it forbidden, and they didn’t want to encourage students to do anything illegal. She told The Post that officials put her on administrative leave. In its statement, the district rebutted that claim, saying Boismier was never placed on administrative leave or suspended.  
  
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But they did punish her, the district spokesperson said. At a Tuesday meeting, administrators told Boismier she was being admonished for “making personal, political statements during class time and using their classroom to make a political display expressing those opinions.”  
  
“Like many educators, the teacher has concerns regarding censorship and book removal by the Oklahoma state legislature,” Moody wrote in a statement to The Post. “However, as educators it is our goal to teach students to think critically, not to tell them what to think.”  
  
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Administrators asked Boismier to report back to her classroom Wednesday morning. Instead, she resigned. Boismier told The Post if she stayed and taught the way she always has, she feared being hit with an escalating series of punishments.  
  
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So, Boismier said, she accelerated things and is out of a job, wishes she were still teaching in a classroom and doesn’t know what she’ll do next. Still, she has no regrets over what she did or resigning. She recognized the school district was in a tight spot and said she placed most of the blame on Oklahoma Republicans for fomenting what she described as a growing culture of fear, confusion and uncertainty in schools.  
  
Amid that climate, Boismier said, she doesn’t feel like she has a place in an Oklahoma classroom.  
  
She hopes that changes.  
  
Boismier said she might get a job coaching teachers on how to instruct students more effectively. Or she could get into education advocacy. Whatever she does, she plans to stay in education — in Oklahoma.  
  
“That’s a message that I’d like to send to the folks at the top of the food chain in state leadership,” she said. “I’m not going anywhere.”  
  
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# ‘Don’t say trans’: Texas school board’s new policies spark an outcry

Anne Branigin

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In the early hours of Tuesday morning, after a “marathon” school board session featuring four hours of debate from parents, students and community members, the Grapevine-Colleyville Independent School District in North Texas narrowly passed a sweeping set of policies that includes a total ban on all classroom discussion of “gender fluidity.”  
  
The new rules also impose more limits on how race, gender and sexuality are taught; restrict which bathrooms transgender youths can use; and give greater power to the school board to determine which books are available in school libraries.  
  
Last year, state lawmakers passed a law limiting how race, slavery and history are taught in public schools. The district made national headlines then, too, after a Black principal was put on leave after being accused of teaching critical race theory.  
  
The new rules — which passed in a 4-3 vote — are indicative of how school boards have become the “epicenter” of efforts to push anti-inclusive policies, LGBTQ and civil rights advocates say. GCISD is among a “cluster” of districts moving to further restrict education in this way, according to Kate Huddleston, a staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas.  
  
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The policies also go “far beyond” Texas law, Huddleston said: “As far as I know, this is the most extreme policy, particularly in terms of classroom censorship … of any district in Texas.”  
  
On Monday, GCISD board President Casey Ford said that the policies “are a reflection of Texas law and community values,” according to the Dallas Morning News. Ford said the changes came from “input from several groups,” including the board — which added two new conservative members in May — district lawyers, school administrators, community members and lawmakers, the outlet reported.  
  
The proposals were made available to the public only 72 hours before being voted on, according to the Texas Observer.  
  
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Rachel Hill, government affairs director for Equality Texas, an LGBTQ advocacy organization, called the new policies “a grab-bag of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination and censorship policies.”  
  
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“They took a lot of the policies that were floating out there in the national district and combined them all in one place,” Hill said. “Not only are these policies harmful individually, but kids are facing the full brunt of all of them together.”  
  
The recent school board changes signal how anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and legislation, which have spiked across the country in the last couple of years, are winding their way into various communities, “impacting people’s everyday lives,” Hill added. “It’s important to remember that this could happen anywhere, even if you feel like your state policies are more affirming of LGBTQ people.”  
  
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Since 2021, conservative lawmakers have introduced hundreds of bills restricting the rights of LGBTQ people, with much of their attention focused on trans youths. Of this surge in legislation, only a fraction have been enacted into law. But those that have succeeded have seized national attention — alarming LGBTQ communities and advocates and spurring copycat proposals in other places.  
  
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One of the most notable examples is Florida’s Parental Rights in Education policy, referred to by its critics as the “don’t say gay” law. The bill, enacted this summer, bans “instruction” of gender and sexual identity until the third grade, and adds further restrictions through grade 12 for material that is not “age appropriate or developmentally appropriate.” Parents are able to sue schools if they believe the schools have violated these guidelines. (Last month, Florida’s largest school district, Miami-Dade County, narrowly rejected a previously approved sex-education textbook for middle and high schools on the grounds that it violated the law.)  
  
GCISD’s new policies echo the Florida law, barring discussion of gender and sexual identity until the sixth grade and enacting a total ban on talking about “gender fluidity” — which the district defines in part as any theory that “espouses the view that an individual’s biological sex should be changed to ‘match’ a self-believed gender that is different from the person’s biological sex.”  
  
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Critics of this policy have referred to it as the “don’t say trans” rule.  
  
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The policies also state that multiple-occupancy bathrooms or changing facilities “shall be designated for and used only by persons based on the person’s biological sex,” though it does allow schools to provide “reasonable accommodations upon request,” the Dallas Morning News reported.  
  
In addition, the school board gave itself a larger role in selecting books and barred “equity audits” — which collect data on schools’ cultural, socioeconomic and racial dynamics.  
  
Teachers are also no longer required to use the pronouns used by trans, nonbinary and gender-nonconforming children, even if a parent or guardians have asked them to do so.  
  
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Hill, of Equality Texas, called this part of the new rules particularly hypocritical: “This isn’t about respecting all students or respecting all parents and families. It’s about one particular parent voice. … It’s about anti-LGBTQ policies.”  
  
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A passionate debate preceded the vote and featured almost 200 speakers, each of whom had been given a time limit of 60 seconds, according to the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.  
  
“We have seen the overt, nefarious infiltration of social and cultural propaganda in the curriculum, none more damaging to young minds and bodies than the madness of so-called gender fluidity ideology,” said GCISD board member Tammy Nakamura, in a video shared by a local NBC News station.  
  
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Julie McCarty, chief executive of the True Texas Project, a right-wing advocacy group that has touted extremist messaging, said the policy gave parents a voice in their children’s education, and that parents in other districts in the state were taking note of the board’s actions, per the Star-Telegram.  
  
Opponents of the new policies told the trustees the policies would erase LGBTQ people — and may even endanger students’ lives.  
  
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“You can talk about Santa Claus, but you can’t talk about gay people to fifth-graders,” said Mike Sexton, whose children go to GCISD schools, according to the Texas Tribune. “This is incredible — you’re acting like people don’t exist.”  
  
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“Are you ready to be responsible for even one child taking their life?” a former GCISD high school student asked. “With these new policies you will alienate them even more from getting help, so they feel that suicide is their only escape.”  
  
The student, who identifies as LGBTQ, transferred to another district this year because of “the culture of fear” school officials have created, the Texas Observer reported.  
  
A recent survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that nearly half of gay, lesbian and bisexual teens said they contemplated suicide during the pandemic, compared with 14 percent of their straight, cisgender peers. Research suggests that number is even higher for young trans people.  
  
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Huddleston, the ACLU of Texas attorney, said the new policies violate students’ First Amendment rights, as well as federal anti-discrimination laws.  
  
“All options are on the table” when it comes to challenging the policies, said Huddleston: “We are extremely concerned and evaluating the policy as passed.”  
  
The high-profile battle over the new policies highlights how much political energy — and money — have shifted toward small, hyperlocal venues like school boards.  
  
GCISD is a relatively small district — covering 21 schools and around 14,000 students, half of whom are racial minorities. Still, its recent school board election, which resulted in two new conservative board members, attracted a spike in political donations, according to NBC News.  
  
Among the donors was the Patriot Mobile, which bills itself as “America’s only Christian conservative wireless provider.” (According to multiple reports, Patriot Mobile was a prominent presence at this week’s board meeting and had set up tents for the overflow of attendees.)  
  
“This is all political,” said Jorge Rodríguez, a trustee who voted against the policies. “These board meetings have just become headquarters for political campaigns instead of focusing on what we are here to do, which is to help students succeed.”  
  
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# Opinion | Mississippians with no water to drink? Blame racial politics.

Paul Waldman

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If you want to understand today’s GOP, Republicans themselves will tell you, look to the states. See the paradise being created by our terrific governors, such as Ron DeSantis in Florida or Greg Abbott in Texas, and you’ll understand what this party is all about. Sign up for a weekly roundup of thought-provoking ideas and debates ArrowRight Or you could look at deep-red Mississippi, where residents of the state capital and largest city now have no running water.  
  
This is a complex and expensive problem to fix, but experts say it dates back decades — to when White residents began fleeing the city of Jackson, leaving it with a smaller, lower-income tax base and a declining ability to keep its utilities working. The city is now 82 percent Black, which many people there believe explains the state’s lack of interest in maintaining the city’s infrastructure. For a month, residents have been under an order to boil their water because of possible contamination, and now many have no water at all.  
  
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A similar story played out in Flint, Mich., a few years ago: A poor, majority-Black city’s water crisis was ignored by a Republican-run state government until it reached a point of catastrophe.  
  
Some will object that infrastructure problems can be found everywhere in America, not just in red states. Poorer communities — regardless of their racial makeup, including rural ones — are more likely to be ignored by both Democrats and Republicans in power. That is absolutely true.  
  
But it’s also true that, at the very least, Democrats can say they want to confront the problem. It took a Democratic president and Congress to pass an infrastructure bill last year, a bill that included nearly $55 billion to upgrade the nation’s water systems.  
  
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And when you look at places such as Mississippi, what you see can only be described as malign neglect. State lawmakers killed the city’s efforts to fund infrastructure with a sales tax hike. And when tens of thousands of city residents went without running water for weeks, Republican Gov. Tate Reeves called for better collection of water bill payments, rather than support from the state.  
  
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A 2021 bill that would have authorized a bond issuance to assist Jackson with making repairs and improvements to water and sewer systems died in the Republican-controlled state House Ways and Means committee.  
  
As one expert told The Post when the infrastructure bill passed, “you have to be worried that this money going to statehouses will not actually get to places like Jackson” as long as the White power structure has a hand in distributing it. After all, Republicans who control the state’s government have more pressing things to worry about, such as chasing the phantom of critical race theory, outlawing abortion and suppressing the votes of Black people.  
  
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Meanwhile, next door in Alabama — another state run entirely by White Republicans — there are rural areas where Black residents have no working sewage system, and run PVC pipes from their toilets out to open pits in their yards. When a United Nations poverty official visited there a few years ago, he said he had never seen anything like it anywhere in the developed world.  
  
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Now ask yourself: If this was a problem most urgent and visible in states run by Democrats, how eager do you think Republicans at the national level would be to address it?  
  
Back in Mississippi, Reeves declared a state of emergency; it’s hard not to suspect that it was the sudden wave of media attention, more than the suffering of his constituents, that prodded him to act. President Biden declared his own emergency, directing federal resources to the state.  
  
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There was a time when politicians of every party knew they couldn’t get reelected if they didn’t provide basic services. All the things we take for granted in a modern, functioning society — electricity, water, sewage, roads — are supposed to become volatile campaign issues if they stop working.  
  
But today’s polarization and the nationalization of every office — where even people running for dogcatcher have to take a position on Donald Trump and abortion — have in many places broken the link between the basic obligations of governance and victory at the polls.  
  
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Reeves doesn’t have to care about whether Black people in Mississippi have water to drink. His state is 38 percent Black, but because the state’s White voters are so emphatically Republican, every statewide elected official is a White Republican, and the GOP has a bulletproof state legislative supermajority. If he wants to declare April to be Confederate Heritage Month — as he has done twice — he knows the only votes he’ll lose are ones he wasn’t going to win anyway.  
  
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And he knows the only thing that might stand between him and reelection is a primary challenge from the right. So like many other Republican governors, while he can ensure that the infrastructure that serves his constituents keeps working, until a crisis hits, he doesn’t have to.  
  
Similarly, even a systemwide failure, such as the one the Texas power grid suffered last year, might only be a speed bump on the way to reelection. Republicans there can just whip people into a rage about dangerous books at the local library or a trans girl who wants to play softball.  
  
So if you’re looking for public officials who’ll make a good-faith effort to solve these infrastructure problems, you might not want to rely on the Republicans who run the states where those problems are most urgent. They might get around to it — but only if they decide they have nothing better to do.  
  
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# A Mich. library refused to remove an LGBTQ book. The town defunded it.

Danielle Paquette

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JAMESTOWN, Mich. — Two librarians had quit since the trouble began, and Kaitlin McLaughlin didn’t want to be the third. But the same term kept coming up in board meetings and on yard signs, making her feel awkward and wrongly accused: grooming. Wp Get the full experience. Choose your plan ArrowRight People in this western Michigan farming town said the Patmos Library was “grooming” children and, according to fliers that one group printed, promoting an “LGBTQ ideology.” They said bookshelves meant for young readers featured same-sex pornography. They called the staff pedophiles, McLaughlin said. Then one August morning, they voted to defund Jamestown’s only public library, jeopardizing the institution’s future as neighbors clashed over who gets to decide free speech in this deep-red corner of America.  
  
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“I’m not a ‘groomer,’ ” said McLaughlin, 34, gathering children’s books for a lunchtime story hour. “I’m not a pedophile. I’m afraid of what people see when they look at me.”  
  
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The vitriol in Jamestown spiked with the rise of groups campaigning across the United States to banish texts with LGBTQ characters, accusing authors, teachers and librarians of trying to brainwash the nation’s youth. The American Library Association said it counted an “unprecedented” number of book ban attempts in 2021, noting that most of the titles dealt with sexual orientation, gender identity or racism.  
  
Americans have long sought to censor literature — “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” was an 1852 target for its anti-slavery message — but debates over transgender rights and critical race theory have lately spawned aggressive grass-roots movements to control the worldviews shared with children.  
  
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Which is how a railroad-themed library on the site of an early 20th-century train station lost the financial support of its community. Which is why the staff — three librarians, down from the usual roster of five — are mulling which activities they might have to slash (puppet shows? craft-ernoons?) and how long the lights can stay on.  
  
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“The loss would be enormous,” said McLaughlin, the youth services librarian. “We have something for every single person — from every walk of life.”  
  
Jamestown, with a population of nearly 10,000, has Christian conservative roots. Dutch last names are common — a legacy of the Calvinists who split from the Netherlands in the mid-1800s to settle here and practice a stricter form of Christianity. The county celebrates this heritage each spring with a tulip festival.  
  
The 22-year-old library hosts birthday parties, bridal showers, HOA meetings and blood drives. Residents praised it as a haven for all ages until controversy ignited with an award for the best teen books.  
  
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The National Library Association’s young adult branch named 10 winners in 2020, including a post-apocalyptic thriller about a boy searching for his lost dog, a science-fiction horror about twins with superpowers and a memoir about growing up nonbinary called “Gender Queer.”  
  
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Amber McLain, the library’s director at the time, ordered a copy of each. Pink-haired and openly queer, the 30-year-old stood out in a county that hadn’t backed a Democrat for president since 1864. Yet people embraced McLain, her former colleagues and patrons said.  
  
“She helped bring my son out of his shell,” said one mother, Sara Crockett, checking out a STEM toy kit on a recent afternoon. “He’d light up when he saw her.”  
  
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“I miss Miss Amber,” 5-year-old Cecil said, clutching her hand.  
  
Nobody complained about McLain until last November, after video of a Virginia mother condemning “Gender Queer” as “pornographic” took off on social media and protests against the memoir spread nationwide.  
  
The 239-page graphic novel contains illustrations of masturbation, a sex toy and oral sex, as well as depictions of menstrual blood. Fans saw the scenes as part of the author’s coming-of-age experience, while critics blasted them as sabotage to developing minds. “Gender Queer” became the most banned book of 2021.  
  
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Some parents found a copy in the Patmos Library and created a Facebook group called “Jamestown Conservatives” pushing for its removal. One of the organizers, Lauren Nykamp, declined to be interviewed but responded to some of The Washington Post’s questions over text. “This is not about LGBTQ material,” she said. “It is about sexualized material.”  
  
One resident posted on the Facebook page: “These pictures cannot be unseen and they are dangerous and disturbing!”  
  
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Another wrote that a “Marxist lesbian” led the National Library Association, adding that “this shows the mindset of those we are up against.”  
  
Several appeared at board meetings, railing against “Gender Queer” and McLain. One grandfather told her that “God designed the original plumbing,” that marriage should stay between a man and a woman, and that exposing children to content outside of those bounds could lead to suicide, pedophilia and human trafficking.  
  
“I know we live in a nation where you can have your right to your lifestyle, and that is fine,” he said, according to audio of a meeting last November, “but we don’t need to push it on our kids.”  
  
McLain countered that 90 out of their roughly 67,000 books had an LGBTQ keyword. She said they spent the most money on Christian fiction.  
  
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Nykamp, the Jamestown Conservative organizer, was also there, lambasting “Gender Queer” as pornographic.  
  
“On Page 135, I can see a middle-aged man with an erection touching another young man’s erection,” she told the room. “Possibly a man younger than 18.”  
  
The township supervisor, Laurie Van Haitsma, sided with Nykamp.  
  
“It’s graphic as you can be,” she said. “I would not want my children and grandchildren seeing it.”  
  
A lawyer had reviewed the book and determined it wasn’t pornographic, McLain replied. Still, given the mature content, she’d initially placed it in the adult section — near novels with heterosexual sex scenes. As the objections mounted, though, she moved “Gender Queer” behind the counter, making it available only upon request.  
  
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“We have to represent every segment of the population,” McLain said, “not just the vast majority.”  
  
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The backlash grew from there. One March day, staffers said, a woman showed up at the library, recording a video and yelling: “Where is she? Where is the pink-haired freak? Where is the pedophile librarian?”  
  
McLain hadn’t been there. The library board president told her about the incident, saying she could work remotely if she’d like. (McLain declined to be interviewed for this story but confirmed the sequence of events to The Post.) Citing harassment, she opted to quit.  
  
So did her replacement, Matthew Lawrence, 25, who transferred to a library in another town — he doesn’t feel comfortable saying where — after a tense encounter in June. A patron had demanded to know if he was gay, he said, and insisted he remove a rainbow-hued sign that said: “Please use the other door.”  
  
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The environment had grown hostile, Lawrence said, but seeing the local official join the protest against “Gender Queer” ultimately motivated him to leave.  
  
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“The complaint is that kids are going to pick it up and see things they can’t unsee,” he said. “The easiest way to avoid that is to parent your children.”  
  
The battle was brewing at a pivotal moment: Every 10 years, Jamestown voted on renewing the Patmos Library’s public funding, the bulk of its budget, and the next decision was slated for August. This time around, the library had proposed a slight increase. Board members estimated that the annual bill for the average household would rise to $20.  
  
The Jamestown Conservatives responded with fliers saying that the library peddled “LGBTQ CONTENT” and “PORNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS” and that the community must address “these evils.” Up went yard signs against approving tax dollars to “GROOM our kids.”  
  
“If you think your child needs to have sexual books, on either side of sexuality, then you should pick it up at the store and share it at home,” said Jodi Buchanan, 58, a Christian thrift shop volunteer who applauded her neighbor’s “GROOM” sign.  
  
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Buchanan said she voted against the funding renewal to send a message, doubting that the Patmos Library would actually be forced to shutter.  
  
“That’s a threat to the community,” she said.  
  
On Election Day in August, about a third of the town’s voters turned out. A slim majority chose to defund the library.  
  
“You want to defund the freaking library?” asked Chavala Ymker, 23, a nonprofit farmworker who grew up behind the building.  
  
As a home-schooled teenager, Ymker, who uses they/them pronouns, said they’d wander over and dig into a series about World War II or a paper house-building guide or an Amish romance novel — their “spiciest” indulgence.  
  
“When I was stressed or anxious, I’d go there to relax,” Ymker said. “It always felt like a safe and welcoming place.”  
  
Any theme could be seen as threatening, so McLaughlin decided the safest bet for her recent story hour was “cats.”  
  
It had been nine days since the vote, and the librarian told herself to stay strong for the children. A Christian, she’d started the morning with a plea to God: Please let people see that my co-workers and I aren’t here to groom anyone for any causes.  
  
At first, she thought the term was silly — grooming — and associated it with her boyfriend’s family golden retriever. Gradually, it came to haunt her. Parents remained polite to her, but what if they harbored doubts about her intentions?  
  
“How are you today?” McLaughlin asked a mom and daughter on a bench outside, where she liked to read when the weather was nice. “I’m going to be reading about cats.”  
  
“Oh! I love cats!” a 9-year-old girl with blonde pigtails replied.  
  
“I’m going to start with a silly book called ‘Stack the Cats,’ ” McLaughlin said.  
  
Two other moms perched in the shade. Three little boys crowded at their feet. Yellow daffodils swayed in the breeze.  
  
“One cat sleeps. Two cats play,” McLaughlin read in a singsong voice. “Three cats! What do you do with three cats?”  
  
The children stared.  
  
“You stack them!”  
  
McLaughlin yearned for the critics to see what really went on here. She told patrons that her only agenda was promoting literacy. She made $16.25 an hour and supplemented her income with shifts at a senior home. It was enough to cobble together a decent living, but McLaughlin — who’d lost her job for two months during the pandemic — wondered if she should be looking for a more stable paycheck.  
  
Patmos Library had enough money to stay open until late next year, and the board had scrambled to get the funding issue back on the November ballot, hoping they could change the town’s mind before the midterm elections.  
  
One resident, meanwhile, started a GoFundMe to cover financial gaps. It had already raised $146,000 — about $100,000 shy of the library’s yearly budget.  
  
The support touched McLaughlin, but quietly, she feared for her safety. If people truly thought they were grooming children, harassment could fester into something worse.  
  
The librarian wasn’t sure what to do, so she just kept reading.  
  
“Two cats hide and two cats seek,” McLaughlin intoned to her story hour audience. “And four cats stack!”  
  
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# Is the United States headed for civil war?

Marc FisherA Senior EditorWrites About Most Anything. He Has Been The Washington Post S Enterprise EditorLocal ColumnistBerlin Bureau ChiefHe Has Covered PoliticsEducationPop CultureMuch Else In Three Decades On The MetroStyle

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Outlook Is the United States headed for civil war? Fighting words and extremism are on the rise. We are not yet in ‘Turner Diaries’ territory, but that doesn’t mean the country will avoid violent conflict. John W. Tomac for The Washington Post  
  
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It’s easy and logical to conclude that the United States today stands as close to the edge of civil war as it has since 1861. A broad variety of voices — including Republican and Democratic politicians, academics who study civil strife, and extremists on both ends of the spectrum — now accept the idea that civil war is either imminent or necessary. They point to evidence that can seem persuasive: a blizzard of threats against FBI agents, judges, elected officials, school board members and elections supervisors; training camps where heavily armed radicals practice to confront their own government; and polls showing that many Americans expect violent conflict.  
  
But it’s also easy and logical to conclude that the florid rhetoric from right-wing extremists, the worried warnings in mainstream media, and the hail of threats and individual attacks after this month’s surprise FBI search of Donald Trump’s South Florida mansion add up to something well short of the frightening prospect of civil war.  
  
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People who track such threats say this summer’s violent outbursts against federal officials and government institutions amount to one more concerning surge of rage in a pattern that has persisted throughout the pandemic, spiking after the murder of George Floyd two summers ago. But the Anti-Defamation League and other watchdog groups are not seeing the kind of specific planning by private militias and online assemblages of radicals that was evident before last year’s Jan. 6 insurrection and the white-supremacist march in Charlottesville in 2017.  
  
“We are living in a country where disinformation, conspiracy thinking and lies have resulted in deadly attacks,” said Oren Segal, vice president of the ADL’s Center on Extremism. “It’s not exactly kumbaya in this society. But we have been going through this for a long time now, and I don’t see people coming together in the more coherent organizing we saw prior to Jan. 6.”  
  
Contrast that perspective with that of Stephen Marche, author of “The Next Civil War: Dispatches From the American Future,” who posits that as extremists’ threats have become more lurid and specific, their rhetoric has leached into the mainstream — leading, for example, the Texas state government to spell out instances in which it would defy federal authority and the Texas Republican Party to declare President Biden the “acting president” and seek a voter referendum on seceding from the United States.  
  
When he sees small groups of armed men training for combat against government agents, Marche, a Canadian novelist, wants to ring warning bells. “The alarm is getting much more serious, and it’s accelerating very quickly,” he said. “The kind of chaos I’m describing is like internet rage: You could take it as playacting or it could be deadly serious. It could be weekend fun or actual military preparation.” He, along with some other analysts on the left, right and in between, thinks the current noise is a strong indicator that a hot civil war — one likely to feature bombings, assassinations and other assaults on federal institutions and officials — may be imminent.  
  
This split over how seriously to take the threat of civil war is not just another example of America’s deep divisions: It has the great benefit of existing on a foundation of shared facts. Both sets of analysts — those who say we’re heading toward civil strife and those who say the threat matrix is largely limited to lone rangers and small, disorganized groups whose dangerous but scattered acts don’t constitute a civil war — agree there is little chance of an organized, violent attack on the government, or of local or state authorities taking up arms against their federal counterparts. But there remains a sharp divide over whether a mounting series of individual and small-group attacks could add up to a warlike conflict that destabilizes the country.  
  
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What both sides in the civil war debate do agree on is that a more disturbing trend — at this point more dangerous than the sporadic bursts of violence in recent years — is the pervasive loss of trust, hope and sense of belonging in a severely damaged society.  
  
And both sides agree we have been here before.  
  
A quarter-century ago, after the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building, I interviewed William Pierce, the physics professor turned neo-Nazi organizer whose novel “The Turner Diaries” had been taken by the bomber, Timothy McVeigh, as a planning document for launching civil war. In the book, white supremacists conspire to bomb FBI headquarters and spark a wider war against the government. McVeigh had excerpts from the book in his getaway car when he killed 168 people and injured hundreds more.  
  
Pierce, a provocateur who took great pride in his book’s popularity among white supremacists and other extremists, told me that his aim — and that of those he hoped would read his book — was to overthrow the government and rid the country of Jews and Blacks.  
  
“People don’t use the book as a blueprint, but as inspiration,” Pierce told me. “I don’t have the time to write just for entertainment. It’s to explain things to people. I’d like to see North America become a white continent.” He wrote that “if we don’t destroy the System before it destroys us — if we don’t cut this cancer out of our living flesh — our whole race will die.”  
  
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Pierce, who died in 2002, told me he expected individual violent acts inspired by his book to become more frequent. “Terrorism only makes sense if it can be sustained,” he said. “One day, there will be real, organized terrorism done according to plan, aimed at bringing down the government.”  
  
For several decades, “The Turner Diaries” has remained a go-to text for violent extremists, showing up frequently in online chatter by participants in and supporters of the Jan. 6 attack. In the meantime, the internet has blossomed into a far more insidiously efficient tool for those who seek to foment discord and terrorism. Yet although Pierce’s work still inspires single actors and small groups, his wider war has never come close to fruition.  
  
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Today, “civil war” is a rallying cry that some Americans wear on T-shirts and others openly train for with assault weapons. Since the Mar-a-Lago search on Aug. 8, “lock and load” and “civil war” have trended on pro-Trump social media such as Gab and Telegram.  
  
Belligerent rhetoric has also become part of everyday campaigning among some Republicans. A GOP candidate in Florida’s 11th House District, Laura Loomer, who narrowly lost her primary Tuesday, wrote on Telegram on Aug. 8 that it’s “time to take the gloves off. … If you’re a freedom loving American, you must remove the Words decorum and civility from your vocabulary. This is a WAR!” Conservative YouTuber and podcaster Steven Crowder tweeted on the day of the FBI’s descent on Mar-a-Lago that “tomorrow is war.” “It’s time to fight for every square inch,” he reiterated the next day. “It’s time to fight fire with fire.” The pro-Trump Gateway Pundit site wrote “This. Means. War.” On various pro-Trump social media platforms, people talked about buying ammunition and drilling for confrontation with federal agents. “Civil war! Pick up arms, people,” one agitated person tweeted.  
  
Such talk has been a mainstay of the Trump years. Last summer, Rep. Madison Cawthorn (R-N.C.), an election denier, alleged that U.S. election systems are “rigged,” which he said would “lead to one place, and that’s bloodshed.”  
  
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In a new book, “We’ll Be Back: The Fall and Rise of America,” conservative writer Kurt Schlichter games out a civil war and concludes that blue states face a challenge. “It’s nice to hold cities, but if you do not also hold all the rural territory between the cities, as well as the routes to the places where you are getting your food and fuel,” he wrote, “you have a real problem.”  
  
Trump himself, speaking against the teaching of critical race theory at a South Carolina rally this spring, said America’s fate “ultimately depends upon the willingness of its citizens to lay down — and they must do this — lay down their very lives to defend their country.”  
  
One of Trump’s leading critics in his own party, Rep. Adam Kinzinger (Ill.), said early this year on ABC’s “The View” that civil war could erupt. “We have to warn and talk about it so that we can recognize that and fight hard against it,” said Kinzinger, one of two Republicans on the House committee investigating the Jan. 6 attacks.  
  
But Kinzinger has also warned against embracing civil war rhetoric, tweeting in May: “How bout we stop the ‘civil war’ lust. Buy some GI Joes or something.”  
  
In a nation where firearms purchases have almost doubled since the start of the pandemic — driven mainly by fears of rising crime, political unrest and the insecurity of life in the age of covid-19 — appeals like Kinzinger’s have fallen all too flat.  
  
When the Rev. Sun Myung Moon sought to win Americans to his political and spiritual cause, the Unification Church, in the 1970s, he recruited people to sell flowers and ginseng door-to-door. Now, his son Hyung Jin Moon seeks to win followers for his Rod of Iron Ministries by sponsoring training sessions at his compounds in Texas and Pennsylvania — practice, he says, for a coming “patriots’” war against the “deep state.”  
  
The Moons’ churches are both fringe groups, but Hyung Jin’s organization has hosted Trump’s former chief strategist Steve Bannon and current Pennsylvania Republican gubernatorial candidate Doug Mastriano at its “Freedom Festival” events.  
  
Moon’s group is one of the many radical organizations that are increasingly open about their plans. A Brookings Institution study tracked several hundred private militia groups that use anti-government rhetoric to attract Americans worried “about changing demographics, stagnating wages, and how the shift to a multi-racial and multi-ethnic America will affect them.”  
  
But such groups remain disparate and disjointed.  
  
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Many activists who have called for confrontation with the government now claim they meant no such thing; they have flipped the accusation, saying leftists or government agents are out to smash conservative opposition by kindling fear of a civil war launched by right-wingers. Crowder, the YouTube host, called media reports about his tweets an intentional smear.  
  
“Decrying the weaponization of a once-professional FBI, and the scandals among its wayward Washington hierarchy is not insurrectionary,” Victor Davis Hanson, a fellow at Stanford’s Hoover Institution, wrote in American Greatness, an online journal generally supportive of Trump. “Those who warn most of some mythical civil war are those most likely to incite one.”  
  
Does all the noise add up only to vigorous opposition to the government, or is it evidence of concerted preparation for open warfare? The answer depends in part on what you think modern civil war would look like: Would large militias attack government institutions, or would a war be limited to haphazard acts by individuals and small guerrilla factions?  
  
Some say a war of sorts has begun: “The second American civil war is already occurring,” Robert Reich, labor secretary under President Bill Clinton, declared in the Guardian. “But it is less of a war than a kind of benign separation analogous to unhappily married people who don’t want to go through the trauma of a formal divorce.”  
  
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Reich foresees not a violent division of the country but rather something “analogous to Brexit — a lumbering, mutual decision to go separate ways on most things but remain connected on a few big things (such as national defense, monetary policy and civil and political rights).”  
  
Still, many Americans believe that a true, violent civil war is coming. About half of those surveyed this spring by the University of California at Davis’s Violence Prevention Research Program said they expected civil war in the next few years. Another poll, by the Survey Center on American Life, a nonpartisan project affiliated with the conservative American Enterprise Institute, found more than one-third of Americans agreeing that “the traditional American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it.”  
  
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Groups seeking to battle the government have popped up regularly throughout American history.  
  
To determine when such movements around the world have exploded into real civil wars, Barbara Walter, a political scientist at the University of California at San Diego and the author of “How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them,” points to two predictive factors: Countries stuck in an unstable zone between democracy and autocracy are more susceptible to armed conflict. And countries with weakened governments and a population deeply divided by identity — by race, ethnicity or religion — can fall into civil war. Walter sees the Republican Party embracing an “almost white supremacist strategy” that attracts far-right activists eager to fight the federal government.  
  
But other scholars look at the same evidence and see the potential for violence stabilizing or diminishing. Juliette Kayyem, who heads the homeland security program at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, argues that violent movements either grow or shrink. As Trump increasingly looks to his supporters like a loser, she sees them wandering away. The “ideology is not defeated; it simply stops motivating people to action,” she wrote in the Atlantic this month.  
  
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The rhetoric of war is vastly more common than war itself. Violent and dark language has been at the core of Trump’s appeal for many years. Trump’s choice for governor of Arizona, former TV news anchor Kari Lake, for instance, tells crowds that the government is “rotten to the core,” meaning “America is dead.”  
  
That kind of end-times speech strikes some disturbed or radicalized people as an invitation to uprising. But historians and security analysts who’ve studied the latest evidence of civil war planning mainly foresee the kinds of scattered terrorism that the country experienced in the late 1960s and early 1970s, not anything like the buildup to 1860.  
  
Marche has dug into prepper conferences, far-right gatherings and the darkest of online rabbit holes, trying to discern whether their war plans are “weekend fun or actual military preparations. It’s hard to distinguish the fantasists from the people who actually are going to do it,” he said in an interview. In the end, he pronounces himself “really scared.”  
  
No one would call the strife of the 1960s civil war, but “there was enormous violence in that time,” Marche said. “One hundred and forty cities burned, and that’s in a time when you still had a level of institutional trust that could mitigate the violence.”  
  
Now, however, collapsed trust in institutions such as the police, news media, churches and government makes the country more vulnerable to internal attack, he argues. Add this year’s Supreme Court decision on abortion rights, and “you now have another situation like in 1860 where you have two legal statuses of people in different parts of the country, and it just can’t hold,” he said.  
  
Still, Marche notes that “America changes all the time. Reinvention is in the absolute DNA of the country.”  
  
Segal, who tracks extremism for the ADL, sees this month’s burst of war threats as one more sign that “the system is ripe for targeting,” with the FBI now the focus of violent rhetoric and attacks, like school boards, election workers and medical professionals before it. This may not trigger a wider rash of violence, but the danger has not passed. “Based on what happens in the November elections, extremists will adjust and find a boogeyman,” he said.  
  
Segal retains hope that holding the Jan. 6 perpetrators to account and investigating Trump’s role in fomenting that attack “will somehow round the edges of the situation.”  
  
It’s hard to see a civil war emerging from the current mess, but as Segal said, “I’m more concerned about what we can’t see.”  
  
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# The blueprint for GOP victory in November - The Washington Post

Hugh HewittContributing Columnist

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Summer used to end on Labor Day. Now, it’s over with the first kickoff of a significant college football game, which we will stretch, for argument’s sake, to mean Nebraska vs. Northwestern this Saturday in, of all places, Dublin. Sign up for a weekly roundup of thought-provoking ideas and debates ArrowRight Confused Cornhuskers and Wildcats may struggle to find Dublin on a map (as they have long believed the Irish capital was in South Bend, Indiana). But with the first official play from scrimmage, summer comes to a thudding stop and fall is underway.  
  
As are the midterm campaigns. “Election Day” is no longer a moment — Nov. 8 is the official date this year — but a season. Voting in the congressional races gets underway 46 days earlier in Minnesota and South Dakota, 45 days earlier in Virginia and Wyoming and 40 earlier in Illinois and Michigan. That’s late September, just a month away.  
  
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Democrats will talk about abortion and run endlessly through their “threat to democracy” talking points, but that’s a hard narrative to maintain in the face of gale-force worries about inflation and recession.  
  
The GOP has boiled its message down to a half-dozen themes about what happens when one party — President Biden’s, for the moment — controls both the House and the Senate. The case for every Republican candidate has six paragraphs and a coda.  
  
“Affordability” should lead off most ads and speeches. Gas prices are falling with the approach of recession and the end of summer driving but groceries soared 13 percent year-over-year in July and everyone’s got to eat.  
  
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“Anxiety” covers a host of worries, of course, but serious crime and concern for loved ones tops the list. The concern over violence crescendos with every mass shooting, but it is the fear of crime rising in some suburbs that has the power to boost Republican hopes.  
  
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Ordinary Americans’ continuing “anger” with elites — whether inside big companies, big government, big media or big universities — will once again prove to be a surprise factor in voter turnout, inevitably missed by the pollsters and prognosticators. The anger is powered by a sense of things headed in the wrong direction and a resentment at those who label supporters of Donald Trump as fascists, racists and sexists. Futility at enforcing a border and disinterest in the consequences fuels the upset. The scourge of fentanyl has an address and it includes most entry points along the southern border, particularly San Diego. If Republican Senate hopefuls in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Nevada, Wisconsin, Colorado and Washington state have a hidden superpower, this anger is it.  
  
“Energy” is paragraph four of the GOP agenda and part of the larger debate in this country about fossil fuels. The ground may be shifting slightly toward nuclear power in the face of climate change and rising energy prices. The absurd anti-oil policies of Biden that began with cancellation of the Keystone pipeline have not dissipated even as the cost of gasoline declines.  
  
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“Education” is the sleeper issue for every GOP candidate; so is trouble for school board incumbents who have not stepped forward to renounce mandatory masking or the infusion of critical race theory into primary schools. These issues will define many local elections.  
  
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Then, there is “ESG” — short for “Environmental, Social, Governance policies” — which usually means that large companies at the very least pay lip service to all manner of leftist aspirations from 100 percent “green” energy to declamations against “transphobia.” The ESG list, from where I sit, shape shifts as required by context and is losing its power in the C-suite. But it has gained a grip in corporate culture and workplaces. While big majorities of Americans favor a broad and welcoming acceptance of people of all sexual orientations and compassion toward people struggling through all sorts of identity crises, those same majorities reject the most extreme demands of the most outspoken activists.  
  
The Democrats gifted Republicans with one last weapon when they voted to add $80 billion to the budget and 87,000 staff to the payroll of the IRS over a decade and bestow a $7,500 tax credit on Americans who can afford to buy and drive electric vehicles. Ford promptly raised the price on its electric-powered “Lightning” 150 pickup. Perhaps that explains why Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm’s message pivoted to “30 percent off solar panels!”  
  
And behind it all, the shame of our abandonment of Afghanistan a year ago next week.  
  
Fall is arriving. No pivots from these themes. Let the campaigning begin.  
  
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# The right has long tried to impose its vision on American education

Adam LaatsAdam Laats Is Professor Of Education At Binghamton UniversitySunyAuthor OfFundamentalist U.The Other School Reformers.

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These tactics — extreme as they are — are only the latest in a century-long conservative effort. Since the 1920s, conservative boycotters have pledged that no tactic is too extreme to keep children safe from school curriculum. One example from the 1970s, where protesters boycotted public schools in Kanawha County, W.Va., reveals how these efforts have long since been driven by a pair of assumptions: first, that the mere exposure to certain ideas poses a dire threat to children and second, that conservative activists have the right to impose their vision of safety on the rest of society.  
  
The explosive Kanawha County school war seemed to come out of nowhere. At a calm, quiet school board meeting on April 11, 1974, the Kanawha County board heard about the new literature textbook series adopted by the state of West Virginia. The new books — part of the Interaction series edited by James Moffett — reflected a new push for inclusion of “multiethnic content.” Instead of only White male authors, the books presented in this series included a range of voices — from militant Black writers such as Eldridge Cleaver and George Jackson to nontraditional poets such as E.E. Cummings, as well as noncanonical pop writers such as daredevil Evel Knievel.  
  
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The school board seemed ready to accept the new books as a matter of course, until one new member spoke up. Alice Moore was new to Kanawha County, but she was an experienced conservative activist who was plugged into national antiabortion and anti-multiculturalism networks. She raised a concern about the use of “dialectology” — nonstandard English — and what she saw as the anti-American tone of the new books.  
  
Although Moore was outvoted on the board, her concerns sparked outrage among right-leaning members of the local community. The next school board meetings were mobbed. Speakers who opposed the new books, including local pastors and members of activist parent groups, tried to make their case. One parent warned that poems like cummings’s “i like my body when it is with your” encouraged children to engage in dangerous sexual experimentation. Protesters believed other selections forced the “language of the ghetto” on White children, using — as many speakers complained — language that was racist because it was anti-White. Overall, conservative parents and pastors were certain that exposure to these books would cause immediate, irrevocable harm to vulnerable children. The books’ tone, as one activist put it, was “negative, racist, impulsive, and in some cases right-down vulgar.”  
  
In an attempt to defend the books during one school board meeting, an English teacher explained that the goal of the series was to help “dispel prejudice.” Moore asked him pointedly, “Do you think a teacher has academic freedom to challenge a child’s belief in God?” Parents had rights, too, Moore insisted, earning loud, raucous applause.  
  
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Yet the right-wing revolt failed to persuade the school board to remove the books before the school year started. In September 1974, ministers from conservative churches in the area such as the Rev. Marvin Horan and the Rev. Avis Hill called for a boycott of public schools until the books were removed.  
  
National conservative leaders climbed on the Kanawha County bandwagon. Phyllis Schlafly praised the protesters for rejecting the notion that a modern education required “a tolerance of violence, theft, adultery, obscenity, profanity and blasphemy.” From the White House, President Gerald Ford’s education secretary, Terrel Bell, encouraged textbook publishers to examine their content and concentrate on “good literature that will appeal to children without relying too much on blood and guts and street language.” Pundit Andrew Tully attacked the books as mere “pornography” that was “imposed on the country by a tiny minority in the name of ‘academic freedom.’ ”  
  
Support from on high emboldened boycotters in Kanawha County, who felt they could not wait for a solution and needed to act immediately — even violently — to shield their children from dangerous literature.  
  
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Angry mobs surrounded schools and the episode turned violent. District offices were dynamited. An elementary classroom was firebombed. Snipers shot school buses on their way to pick up students. A protesting minister led a public prayer for God to kill school board President Albert Anson, and a conservative judge in a nearby town formally charged board members, along with Superintendent Kenneth Underwood, with contributing to the delinquency of minors through the use of “pornographic and un-American” textbooks.  
  
Teachers and administrators lived in fear. Underwood slept in a different place every night because of repeated death threats. One teacher told journalists she had been repeatedly threatened by anonymous phone callers.  
  
In the end, despite all the heat and anger, the protests failed. For one thing, families were not willing to keep their children out of school. By the third week of September, almost all students were back in school. When it came down to it, most families — even ones who might have considered themselves fairly conservative — valued school more than they valued activists’ pleas to boycott the books.  
  
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Soon, another local judge dismissed the charges against Anson and the others as mere harassment. Rallies in favor of the textbooks grew far larger than anti-book protests, including one in Charleston, W.Va., that October with 2,000 participants.  
  
Students also protested in favor of the books. At George Washington High School in Charleston, for instance, students walked out on Sept. 12, with the approval of their principal. As one student leader told journalists, “We felt it’s hard to let a minority rule the majority.”  
  
Conservative leaders seemed authentically surprised. They had assumed that their views about literature, racism and sexuality were shared by the vast majority of Americans. As Alice Moore told an NBC news reporter in the early days of the protest, “the educational establishment is completely removed from the mainstream thinking of the American people.” To their chagrin, Moore and her allies learned the hard way that they, in fact, were the ones who were out of touch with mainstream thinking.  
  
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Right-wing anger was real. Conservative anxiety was powerful. And the resulting threats were dangerous. But conservative assumptions were out of step with reality. Instead of a vast moral majority, by the 1970s only a small and shrinking proportion of families held right-wing ideas about student safety.  
  
Nevertheless, a certain type of conservative activist — the type who dreams of making America great again — has always assumed the privilege of defining the boundaries of student safety for everyone. They have assumed the right to sharply limit academic freedom if it crossed a line that they unilaterally imposed. As in Kanawha County, their outbursts have not been successful. In recent months, despite all the fury about critical race theory and mask mandates, fire-breathing right-wing candidates have tended to lose school-board elections. And politicians like Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee (R) have been burned by embracing conservative attacks on public education.  
  
Yet along the way, protests from the right have inflicted damage on schools and students. Today, just as in the 1970s, protests have spread a toxic blend of fear, anxiety and censorship. Teachers, students and parents might be able to take heart knowing that threats and boycotts often appear to have far broader support than they actually have. But real academic freedom means more than just the eventual defeat of book-burning mobs. It means more than waiting until the next election to oust irresponsible politicians. It means the freedom to teach the truth without always looking over our shoulders.  
  
This essay is the second in the Freedom to Learn series sponsored by PEN America, providing historical context for controversies surrounding free expression in education today.  
  
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# Opinion | Dan Cox’s now-deleted Gab-fest shows why he’s unfit to lead Maryland

Editorial Board

2022-08-29 19:35:37.871000+00:00

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Maryland state Del. Dan Cox, the Republican gubernatorial nominee, has been an active poster on Gab, one of the internet’s better-known and most nauseating cesspools of conspiracy-mongering, florid antisemitism and white supremacist hate speech. What did Mr. Cox post there? We can’t say, and Maryland voters have no way of knowing — because he recently deleted his account, along with more than 1,000 posts on the noxious site.  
  
There’s already plenty of evidence that Mr. Cox is unfit to lead the state. Gov. Larry Hogan, a fellow Republican, has called him a “QAnon whack job,” a “nut” and, this month, mentally unstable. In April, Mr. Cox was a speaker at a rally populated by QAnon crackpots.  
  
He recently termed the FBI’s search of former president Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago home “nothing short of communist stasi police state tactics.”  
  
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This isn’t the first time Mr. Cox has seemingly tried to erase evidence of his radical views; he deleted a tweet, posted as police were being overrun during the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the Capitol, calling then-Vice President Mike Pence a “traitor” for refusing to block certification of Joe Biden’s 2020 election victory.  
  
Gab, founded in 2016, is known principally as one of the most prominent online forums for hate speech so vile that it is banned on Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and elsewhere. The sources of its notoriety are plentiful; among other lowlights, Gab is where mass murderer Robert Bowers posted his antisemitic rants before he barged into a Pittsburgh synagogue and killed 11 worshipers in 2018. Neo-Nazi screeds are popular Gab fodder.  
  
Of all the social media forums on which to post 1,000 times, Mr. Cox chose Gab. Why — and what did he have to say before he had the record erased? Marylanders deserve answers. Unfortunately, Mr. Cox generally eschews questions from the mainstream media, preferring to speak mainly to his Republican base.  
  
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As for what he does believe, or which policies he would pursue as governor, that is also shrouded in mystery. His website enumerates a few positions: he would “end unconstitutional mask, vaccine and health mandates”; “end the divisive CRT [critical race theory] and make our schools free from political or gender ideological indoctrination”; and empower law enforcement “to remove criminal illegal aliens from our communities.” He “promises to protect all life from conception” and defend gun rights.  
  
As for the pressing issues most Marylanders care about — improving transportation infrastructure, safeguarding the Chesapeake Bay, driving down Baltimore’s homicide rate, ensuring quality schools with adequate funding — he is silent. Marylanders deserve a better choice and more transparency than Mr. Cox appears willing to provide.  
  
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# Charlie Crist could derail DeSantis's 2024 presidential hopes - The Washington Post

Jennifer Rubin

2022-08-24 16:29:22.729000+00:00

Understanding the 2022 Midterm Elections  
  
November’s midterm elections are likely to shift the political landscape and impact what President Biden can accomplish during the remainder of his first term. Here’s what to know.  
  
When are the midterm elections? The general election is Nov. 8, but the primary season is nearing completion, with voters selecting candidates in the New York and Florida primaries Tuesday. Here’s a complete calendar of all the primaries in 2022.  
  
Why are the midterms important? The midterm elections determine control of Congress: The party that has the House or Senate majority gets to organize the chamber and decide what legislation Congress considers. Thirty six governors and thousands of state legislators are also on the ballot. Here’s a complete guide to the midterms.  
  
Which seats are up for election? Every seat in the House and a third of the seats in the 100-member Senate are up for election. Dozens of House members have already announced they will be retiring from Congress instead of seeking reelection.  
  
What is redistricting? Redistricting is the process of drawing congressional and state legislative maps to ensure everyone’s vote counts equally. As of April 25, 46 of the 50 states had settled on the boundaries for 395 of 435 U.S. House districts.  
  
Which primaries are the most competitive? Here are the most interesting Democratic primaries and Republican primaries to watch as Republicans and Democrats try to nominate their most electable candidates.

# A $20 million makeover turned a D.C. school into a modern art museum

Peggy Mcglone

2022-08-30 14:36:47.984000+00:00

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correction An earlier version of this story incorrectly said that the Rubells' artist-in-residence program in Miami began in 2019. It was started in 2011. The story has been updated. Mera Rubell doesn’t want to sit in the new glass entry of the under-construction Rubell Museum DC, so she folds one of the metal chairs that was set up for an interview in the sunny atrium and heads into the historic building. Followed by husband Don Rubell and a small entourage of staff, she passes through the former Randall School auditorium and into one of the original classrooms, a brick and white-walled space that will soon hold pieces from the couple’s famed collection.  
  
“Yesterday we spent all day sitting in each room … figuring out the spirit of each room and thinking about the art,” said Mera, 78, trying to explain how she and Don are choosing the pieces that will be on view when the Rubell Museum DC opens Oct. 29.  
  
“It was five hours,” Don, 81, corrected.  
  
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“We spent all this time sitting in these different rooms to figure out what’s going to hang in them,” Mera said, without acknowledging the interruption. “An artwork in this room is going to feel different than in another room.”  
  
“We made permanent decisions yesterday which will be changed somewhere between Friday and Monday,” Don added with a grin.  
  
Don and Mera Rubell will become Washington’s newest museum owners when their second museum — they have run a museum in Miami since 1993 — opens at 65 I St. SW with 24 galleries showcasing some of the 7,400 pieces of contemporary art the Miami-based couple have collected since 1965.  
  
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The $20 million renovation of a building that opened in 1906 as Cardozo Elementary School and became Randall Junior High School in 1927 features 32,000 square feet of galleries, a bookstore and cafe. It will join the Phillips Collection, the Hirshhorn, the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington’s crowded field of art museums.  
  
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A museum in the nation’s capital — not far from Arena Stage and Nationals Park — has been a dream for more than a dozen years, explain the couple, who have been married for 58 years. As owners of the Capitol Skyline Hotel one block east on I Street, the Rubells promoted their love of art with art fairs and other events.  
  
“Contemporary art is a catalyst for serious conversation,” Don said, noting that artists grapple with the most pressing issues of the day, including race, immigration, violence and identity. Where better to have these conversations than in the shadow of the Capitol, he added.  
  
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“There are ideas that are percolating in Washington that may not have gotten to the rest of the country. We’re going to try to bring art related to those ideas,” he continued. “It’s not worth doing unless we really affect people.”  
  
“Contemporary art is profoundly relevant to people’s lives,” Mera added. “It’s not like we’re going to teach people about art, okay? We are blown away by the art. We’ve been committed to buying it, we’re committed to caring for it. But I would say the greatest learning we get is from the public that comes to see it.”  
  
On a recent, steamy summer morning, the Rubells spoke — often over each other, in the way long-married couples do — about their passion for contemporary art, their belief in its power to change hearts and minds, and their instinctive, if unusual, approach to collecting and curating.  
  
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“It’s not so much theory and scholarship as an emotional connection with the work that we’ve collected,” Mera said, elaborating on their curatorial process. “Because we have the privilege of having the work in our own [Miami] warehouse, we’ll put three pieces in here … and say ‘Ahh, it doesn’t look good. I think we need to put it over there, or you know what, I don’t think we’re going to put it in at all.’  
  
“It’s the physicality of the work. but it's also the relationships. We create relationships based on some experimentation. We'll bring work here and see how it feels.”  
  
They are not sweating the decision because it can always — and will always — change. “The pleasure comes in constantly changing it,” Don said.  
  
Consulting with their son, Jason, Rubell Museum Director Juan Valadez and Caitlin Berry, newly appointed as Rubell Museum DC’s director, the Rubells are selecting pieces from their collection that explore social and political issues, and many will be on public view for the first time. Kehinde Wiley’s monumental painting “Sleep” will be included in the opening exhibition. The 11-by-25-foot work, based on an 18th-century painting by Jean-Bernard Restout, is one of Wiley’s series that explores Black identity by situating contemporary subjects in old settings. Wiley painted Barack Obama’s presidential portrait for the National Portrait Gallery.  
  
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On view will be “Untitled (Against All Odds),” a series of dystopian paintings by Keith Haring, a family friend they supported at a critical moment in his career. The series is in memory of Steve Rubell, Don’s brother and co-owner of the famous New York City disco Studio 54, who was 45 when he died of AIDS in 1989. Paintings from the “Shell" series, by D.C.-based artist Sylvia Snowden, who studied at Howard University under David Driskell, were acquired for the new museum. The series focuses on Snowden’s daughter and is the companion to “Malik, Farewell 'til We Meet Again,” pieces inspired by the 1993 shooting death of her son that were exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 2000.  
  
The galleries will also feature Mickalene Thomas’s “Mama Bush II, Keep the Home Fires Burnin’” and works by Hank Willis Thomas, Cecily Brown, February James and Vaughn Spann.  
  
The Rubells’ curating, like their collection, is grounded in instinct, feelings and curiosity. “You have got to stay curious, open and curious,” Mera says of their approach. Adds Don: “Our curiosity is really about the new.”  
  
The search for “the new” has driven their choices since the beginning. The couple have always focused on early-career artists and on buying multiple works. They often used payment plans of $5 or $10 a week when they were starting out as collectors, the couple said. Artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Cindy Sherman, Haring and Thomas benefited from their early support. Don retired as a doctor years ago, and the couple now fund their purchases from their investments.  
  
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“We’re not oil barons, we’re not railroad barons, we’re a working family. We have been very fortunate, but we’re still working people,” Mera said.  
  
The new venture isn’t going to play second fiddle to the Miami museum, which they opened in Wynwood in 1993 and moved in 2019 to Allapattah, a neighborhood that is closer to downtown and public transportation. On view in the 100,000-square-foot space are works by Yayoi Kusama, Cajsa von Zeipel and Reginald O’Neal. Another exhibition, “30 Americans,” has been on tour for more than a decade; it continues at the New Britain Museum of American Art through October.  
  
The Rubells bought the Capitol Skyline Hotel in 2002 and worked to make it into an arts hub. A few years later, the now-defunct Corcoran Gallery of Art purchased the former school with the idea of expanding its educational footprint, a plan the Rubells heartily endorsed. When the 2008 economic crash ended that plan, the Rubells partnered with local developer Telesis in 2010 to bid on a development deal that included renovating the school for their art collection and building apartments on the surrounding land. They added a partner, the national developer Lowe Enterprises, to complete the project, which includes Gallery 64, an adjacent 492-unit apartment building, where one-fifth of the units are affordable housing.  
  
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The Randall School’s classrooms and auditorium have been transformed into galleries featuring pristine white walls, exposed brick, arched doorways and honey-colored wood floors and ceilings.  
  
“The shapes are extraordinary,” Mera says, gesturing to the arches, windows and massive beams in the exposed ceiling. “We wanted to expose these. They come from 200-year-old trees,” she said.  
  
The school setting is a significant theme, Mera noted. She was a Head Start teacher in New York City and Don was in medical school when they started collecting art. She says a professor at Duke, where son Jason earned his degree in art history, played a role in their decision to share their collection with the public. Now 53, Jason had amassed his own art collection — starting at age 12 with money from his teenage job stringing tennis rackets — which he merged with his parents’ larger holdings to create the Rubell Family Collection. Daughter Jennifer, 51, is an artist based in New York who shares her eye and expertise, too.  
  
Berry, the former director of the Cody Gallery at Marymount University in Arlington, Va., will apply her deep knowledge of D.C.'s arts scene to tailor the museum to local audiences. She will collaborate with Valadez, the Miami museum director who has worked for the couple for 22 years, to shape the museum’s public programming.  
  
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“I bring a deeper knowledge of D.C. All of the curatorial work will be done with D.C. audiences in mind,” Berry said. “My role is to make this museum a part of the community and to help that community feel welcome.”  
  
The Rubells have not determined whether they will replicate Miami’s artist-in-residence program, which began in 2011 and provided critical visibility to artists including Lucy Dodd, Sterling Ruby and Oscar Murillo. They are still discussing the number and type of public and educational programs, they said.  
  
“Contemporary art can really change lives, especially teenagers’, because art has this extraordinary way of giving you a vision of possibilities,” Mera said. “Art changed our lives. If we’re successful, art might change other people’s lives.”  
  
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