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China Seriously Misjudged Iran Situation, Sources Say

By Eva Fu

Chinese response muted, reflected shock, hours after US-Israel strikes began, insiders say

When Western allies reacted to the U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran, Beijing's response was measured.

The Chinese foreign ministry statement came seven hours after the operation began and contained slightly more than 80 words. The spokesperson said Beijing is "highly

concerned" and called for "an immediate stop to the military actions."

There was no mention of either the United States or Israel.

The statement was a "downgraded version" after multiple revisions, according to one insider close to individuals in Beijing's diplomatic system. The muted tone was a reflection of shock, according to the source, which was

confirmed by a separate source close to the Chinese foreign affairs system.

They said China's authorities had misjudged the situation and dismissed the possibility of a U.S. military offensive, believing that any conflicts would stay on a rhetorical level and not touch Iran's key power structure.

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ESG MOVEMENT

Vanguard Settles Coal Lawsuit With States

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In the News

China

is dramatically increasing its domestic submarine production and is shifting to all-nuclear, U.S. Naval Intelligence says. ... A11

Thousands of Iranian Americans

have been celebrating efforts to liberate Iran, waving American and pre-revolutionary Iranian flags across the country. ... A3

Emailed bomb and death threats

have targeted six world leaders since January in a China-linked campaign against Shen Yun. ... A1

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▲ An F/A-18F Super Hornet prepares to make an arrested landing on the flight deck of Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in support of Operation Epic Fury, on Feb. 28, 2026.

How Operation Epic Fury Unfolded

By John Haughey

US military needed less than 10 hours to launch attack after president gave the 'go order'

The Pentagon had been choreographing a prospective massive attack on Iran since 1980, but it wasn't until December 2025 that U.S. President Donald Trump, after meeting with Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington, told military planners to give him that devastating option in case the fundamentalist Shia regime refused to end its uranium enrichment program.

Continued on A4

DOJ Charges 30 More Suspects in Minnesota Church Protest Case

DOJ says 25 of the 30 newly indicted individuals have already been arrested

By Savannah Hulsey Pointer

The Department of Justice has charged 30 more individuals for their alleged involvement in a Jan. 18 anti-immigration enforcement protest at a Minnesota church.

According to Attorney General Pam Bondi, 25 of the 30 newly indicted individuals have already been arrested. The indictment was unsealed on Feb. 27.

"At my direction, federal agents have already arrested 25 of them, with more

The indictment says the accused engaged in acts of intimidation.

Continued on A2

6 World Leaders Threatened in China-Linked Campaign Against Shen Yun

By Eva Fu

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's evacuation from his residence in response to a bomb threat on Feb. 24 was not an isolated incident. Instead, he's one of six world leaders targeted in a China-linked intimidation campaign, The Epoch Times has learned.

Since January, bomb and death threats by email have targeted Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te, South Korean President Lee Jae-myung, Italian President Sergio Mattarella, and Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen. Among the latest on the list is Albanese.

The emails are all similar in tone and in the graphic threats they make. All have been written in Chinese. Their message is the same: Cancel scheduled shows by Shen Yun Performing Arts or face consequences.



"If you insist on proceeding with the Shen Yun performance, something will happen to the Canadian prime minister," reads a Feb. 10 email obtained by The Epoch Times. "If you don't care about Mark Carney and all Canadian high-ranking officials' personal safety, then go ahead

Continued on A10

▲ (Clockwise from top L) Canadian PM Mark Carney; Australian PM Anthony Albanese; Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te; S.K. President Lee Jae-myung; Danish PM Mette Frederiksen; and Italian President Sergio Mattarella.

OPINION

America's Iran War Is Off to a Strong Start

By Conrad Black A13



Mapping China's Influence in Latin America

WORLD A8



Published in New York, Washington, Houston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

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How Activists Use New Tech, Old Tactics to Disrupt ICE

Activist networks are modernizing old insurgency tactics, analyst says

By Janice Hisle

A dark-colored SUV without a front license plate rolls through a neighborhood in St. Paul, Minnesota, putting civilian activists on high alert.

They know that their targets—Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents—often drive this type of vehicle.

"They're on the move," an activist assigned to "mobile patrol" reports to a "dispatcher."

The patroller requests "a plate check" and recites the SUV's license plate number.

After typing that number into a database of ICE-affiliated vehicles, the dispatcher responds, "No match."

The motorist drives away, unaware that activists suspected he worked for ICE and were prepared to pounce.

That scenario, which independent reporter Cam Higby posted on X after he infiltrated an online ICE-watch group, happens regularly in Minnesota—the front line of a coordinated effort to thwart federal efforts to detain and deport illegal immigrants.

Unrest over ICE operations has

Continued on A6



The Department of Homeland Security seal.

SAMIRA BOUQU/THE EPOCH TIMES

NATION

MADALINA KILROY/THE EPOCH TIMES



The Supreme Court has blocked a California policy that prohibits school personnel from notifying parents when students request changes to their documented gender identity at school, without the students' permission.

HEATHER DEIN/GETTY IMAGES



“These public servants will pursue rigorous science and deliver the answers Americans deserve.”
Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on appointing new members to a national committee on autism

30

TELEHEALTH FIRMS

The FDA has warned 30 companies that it has said are making false or misleading claims about compounded GLP-1 products being offered on their websites.

Vanguard, World’s 2nd-Largest Fund Manager, Settles Coal Lawsuit With States

Lawsuit alleges Vanguard and others acted in unison to acquire stocks in public coal companies and ultimately drive up utility bills for consumers

By Kevin Stocklin

The long-standing movement to compel corporations to pursue climate and social-justice goals faced a significant setback with the Feb. 26 settlement by Vanguard, the world’s second-largest asset manager, of a lawsuit by 11 state attorneys general that alleged illegal collusion against the coal industry.

Since its origins within the United Nations in 2004, the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) industry has risen to become a powerful tool to influence corporate behavior, often with the support of institutional asset managers that were dominant shareholders in many, if not most, S&P 500 companies. The lawsuit being brought by conservative state attorneys general charged the “Big Three” asset managers—BlackRock, Vanguard, and State Street—with “conspiring to artificially constrict the market for coal through anticompetitive trade practices,” according to a statement from the office of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, who led the effort.

“It is going to send shockwaves through the entire ESG complex,” Brent Webster, Texas assistant attorney general, told reporters at a press conference.

The lawsuit alleges that the three firms acted in unison, acquiring substantial stockholdings in publicly held coal companies in the United States and using their influence to pressure the companies to cut production, driving up utility bills for consumers. It states that these actions are illegal, under the 1914 Clayton Antitrust Act, which prohibits buying stock for the purpose of reducing competition, and the 1890 Sherman Antitrust Act and state antitrust laws that prohibit collusion.

Allegations of Ideological Arm-Twisting

The plaintiffs charged that these asset managers were able to pressure companies to comply with global emissions reduction goals both through private meetings with corporate leaders and by voting the shares they controlled on behalf of investors whose money they managed.

“They all agreed that when they would have those corporate engagements, when they would vote up or down on people’s compensation and whether their boards were re-elected, they would use whether [the companies] were hitting those targets as part of the metrics for how they make those voting determinations,” Webster said. “And so it sent a message to corporate America that this was one of the objectives you needed to undertake if you were going to keep your job.”

The plaintiffs charged that these asset managers were able to pressure companies to comply with global emissions reduction goals.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit are the states of Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

The Big Three rose to prominence because of their offerings of so-called passive index funds, in which, rather than buying individual stocks, investors gain exposure to all the companies in a stated index, such as the S&P 500 index of the largest 500 publicly traded companies.

As the ESG movement gained momentum over the past decade, many asset managers joined global climate clubs such as the U.N.-sponsored Net Zero Asset Managers initiative and Climate Action 100, which often featured commitments that members would work to reduce carbon dioxide emissions across their portfolios. Coal companies, typically the largest carbon dioxide emitters, were often a primary target, despite their role as providers of an abundant, reliable, and affordable power source.

Among the goals of the plaintiffs, Webster said, is that the defendants act as passive fund managers regarding corporate voting as well.

The suit is currently in the discovery phase, having survived a motion to dismiss by the defendants, and is targeting 2028 as the year in which it will go to trial. According to the terms of the settlement, Vanguard agreed to cooperate in the investigation, to hand over its communications with other parties, to refrain from advocating against coal production, and to pay \$29.5 million to plaintiff states, Webster said.

Reactions to the Suit

Regarding the settlement, Vanguard stated: “[Vanguard] has a singular purpose of helping more than 50 million people and their families achieve their financial goals. We’ve reached a resolution to put this matter behind us—a resolution that reaffirms our longstanding practices and standards and the passive nature of our index funds.”

In order to let customers choose how their shares are voted, Vanguard began offering its “investor choice” program in 2023, by which investors in its index funds can select proxy voting options that align with their preferences.

State Street Investment Management has rejected the plaintiffs’ claims.



BRANDON BELL/GETTY IMAGES

Emissions released at the coal-fueled Oak Grove Power Plant in Robertson County, Texas, on April 29, 2024.

“The lawsuit remains baseless and without merit,” a spokesperson for State Street told The Epoch Times. “There was not, and is not, any collusion here aimed at coal prices.

“This settlement does not change that. In fact, State Street has a well-established commitment to investor voting choice.”

BlackRock declined to comment for this article.

According to the suit, the Big Three ownership stakes in the largest U.S. coal companies were 30 percent of Peabody Energy, 34 percent of Arch Resources, 11 percent of NACCO Industries, 29 percent of CONSOL Energy, 30 percent of Alpha Metallurgical Resources, 25 percent of Vistra Corp., 8 percent of Hallador Energy Co., 32 percent of Warrior Met Coal, and 33 percent of Black Hills Corp.

U.S. coal production declined from its peak of more than 1 billion tons in 2008 to 465 million tons in 2024, according to CEIC data, a market analytics group. In what the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis calls the “era of retirements,” energy companies have been aggressively shutting coal plants; the United States’ coal-fired generation capacity fell to 164.6 gigawatts by the end of 2025 from 317.6 gigawatts in 2011.

The End of the ‘Halo Exception’
The lawsuit is pivotal because it is one of the first successful legal ac-

tions against the “halo exception to colluding against the consumer,” Will Hild, executive director of Consumers’ Research, told reporters at the press conference.

Many fund managers and corporate executives believed they were exempt from America’s antitrust laws if their actions supported what they considered to be worthy causes, he said.

“I’m hopeful that this case is going to finally put that to bed—there is no exception,” Hild said.

In May 2025, the Trump administration stated its support for the attorneys general’s lawsuit.

A joint statement from the Federal Trade Commission and the Justice Department reads: “Antitrust laws allow passive fund investing, they allow shareholder advocacy for better corporate governance, and they allow active investing that doesn’t harm competition. ... However, this case alleges much more—the coordinated use of the power of horizontal shareholdings to distort output and prices in energy markets.”

In 2022, the Biden administration worked to codify the incorporation of ESG factors as part of the permitted investment criteria for company pension funds. According to the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, passed in response to fraud and misuse of pension money, pension fund managers could invest only according to financial criteria.

DOJ Charges 30 More Suspects in Minnesota Church Protest Case

Continued from A1

to come throughout the day,” Bondi wrote on X. “YOU CANNOT ATTACK A HOUSE OF WORSHIP. If you do so, you cannot hide from us—we will find you, arrest you, and prosecute you.”

The protest interrupted a worship service at Cities Church in St. Paul. The protesters chanted “ICE out,” using the acronym for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The animus was apparently directed at the pastor, who has served as an ICE official.

These arrests are in addition to nine previous arrests, including those of former CNN anchor Don Lemon and local activist Nekima Levy Armstrong.

Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon commented on the recent indictment on social media,

writing: “For those of you keeping score at home, this is a total of 39 people indicted for attacking an American house of worship, 35 of whom have been ARRESTED (another one was just arrested in the last few minutes).

“A grand jury of Americans found probable cause for these crimes.”

All the defendants are charged with conspiracy against rights of religious freedom at a place of worship and attempting to injure, intimidate, and interfere with the exercise of one’s right of religious freedom at a place of worship, in violation of what is commonly known as the FACE Act.

The indictment says that the accused entered the church in what it terms a “coordinated takeover-style attack” and engaged in acts of intimidation.

Lemon and other defendants have pleaded not guilty to the charges

brought against them previously. The journalist argued that he was not participating in the protest but was there only to document the events.

He and others have argued that their actions are protected under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Cities Church responded to the indictment by stating that the Justice Department’s move “sends a clear message: houses of worship are off limits for those who would use chaos and intimidation to advance a political agenda.”

“The invasion of Cities Church was a planned, coordinated effort to dis-

STEPHEN MATUREN/GETTY IMAGES



Cities Church in St. Paul, Minn., on Jan. 30, 2026.

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China Seriously Misjudged Iran Situation, Sources Say

Continued from A1

“Only [once] the missiles hit the ground and shook Tehran did Beijing hastily make adjustments, exposing how the decision makers had underestimated the risks,” one of them told The Epoch Times.

The initial draft contained wording that directly criticized Israel and the United States, but that was “deleted line by line during the internal meeting deliberations,” the source said, and the eventual principle they reached was “not to touch the United States and Israel.”

Mao Ning, a spokesperson for China’s foreign ministry, confirmed on March 1 that they got no advance notice of the strikes.

Iran has been a strategic partner for China, providing discounted oil while helping Beijing expand its influence in the Middle East. The two signed a 25-year economic and security partnership in 2021, just as China became Iran’s top trading partner for both import and export.

China’s diplomatic officials had conducted a comprehensive assessment of Iran before the strikes, but part of that relied on the framework used in the past few decades, according to another insider.

This is a serious strategic miscalculation. And no one right now dares to bring it up.

Chinese insider

The logic was that a large-scale military operation was unlikely because Iran had never faced full-sized kinetic attacks from the United States despite consistent military threats, he said. And because of that, he said, Beijing has evacuated fewer diplomatic personnel than from Venezuela about the time of the Caracas raid.

“This is a serious strategic miscalculation,” he told The Epoch Times. “And no one right now dares to bring it up.”

The news of Iranian leader Ali Khamenei’s death a day later prompted Beijing’s condemnation. Mao called the killing of Khamenei a violation of international law.

“From the view of the Chinese Communist Party, to have an ‘old friend’ disappearing in this world in such a fashion naturally leads to fears,” China affairs



▲ Plumes of smoke rise from the sites of Israeli air strikes in the southern suburbs of Beirut on March 3, 2026.

analyst Li Linyi told The Epoch Times. “The Chinese officials would be wondering if such a thing could happen to them.”

For the most part, Beijing is still taking a wait-and-see approach, analysts said.

“What the Chinese Communist Party actually cares about here is not the survival of the Iranian regime. It’s about how to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States,” said a Chinese scholar, who asked for anonymity because of safety fears.

U.S. President Donald Trump is meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping soon. Their talks will involve issues concerning Beijing’s core interests, such as trade, technology restrictions, and economic sanctions, the source said, and Beijing would not want to jeopardize the relationship beforehand.

“Under this calculus, a so-called strategic partner can be set aside anytime,” the source said.

Shao Rong contributed to this report.



▲ Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning speaks to reporters in Beijing on Jan. 15, 2024.

Iranian Americans Express Patriotism Over Strikes on Iran

By Travis Gillmore

Thousands of Iranian Americans rallied in support of recent military operations following strikes targeting the country’s ruling authorities, with pre-revolutionary Iranian and American flags seen waving together in demonstrations across the United States.

Houman Hemmati, a Jewish Persian Iranian who escaped Iran’s Islamic revolution in 1979 with family as a child, told The Epoch Times the patriotic surge in the diaspora “isn’t politics.” It is “family coming home.”

“The Iranian American community is not celebrating death, we are celebrating life,” Hemmati said. “The life that was

stolen from us in 1979 is being returned to our brothers and sisters in Iran, and we owe that miracle to the moral courage of the United States and Israel.”

Groups gathered in Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington, chanting and dancing in the streets, many waving flags, photos of President Donald Trump, and handmade signs. Hemmati described the patriotic displays—brimming with emotions, prayers, and tears of joy—as expressions of gratitude and jubilation.

“We are more American today than we have ever been, because America just reminded the world why we risked everything to come here,” he said.

“We did not come to this country to escape one tyranny only to watch America

hesitate before another. We came because America is the one place on earth that still believes freedom is worth defending, and this week, America proved it again.”

Supporters said the military operations underway in Iran, led by the United States and Israel, are a response to the repressive Iranian regime.

“The United States did not start a war this week, it finished one the Islamic Republic began in 1979 against its own people, against Israel, against America, and against civilization itself,” Hemmati said.

“America had both the moral authority and the moral duty to act, and it did. History will record this as the moment the indispensable nation chose courage over comfort, and the entire world became safer because of it.”

The opportunity is a long-lasting peace and human rights, in not just the region, but the world.

Dr. Hooman Melamed

Iranian American Dr. Hooman Melamed lived under the Islamic Republic regime for nearly 13 years before his family moved to the United States. He explained the rise in patriotism as a moment of relief and hope for millions of Iranians.

“Go bring Iran back to what it was before 1979, bring that culture back, and see how the world was a much better place,” Melamed said. “The opportunity is a long-lasting peace and human rights, in not just the region, but the world. Bloodshed and death will be over.”

His father led Iran’s Ministry of Health before the revolution, a role that the surgeon aspires to reclaim if a new government is established.

“It would be like, wow, I get to do something that he never would have thought is possible,” Melamed told The Epoch Times.

Military operations, ongoing since Feb. 28, are meant to facilitate regime change, according to Trump, who repeatedly advised the population of approximately 93 million Iranians to “take over your government,” telling them, “It will be yours to take.”

Melamed likened the situation to the proverb about taking a horse to water, noting that the masses will have to act to drive sustainable change.

“It’s the same situation Trump is taking, taking the country to where it needs to go,” he said. “The rest of the people have got to step up.”

Iranian expats across the country celebrated, with hundreds of videos on social media showing jubilant crowds chanting with smiles on their faces.

“My first reaction was full of joy and excitement,” Sherry Yadegari of Atlanta told The Epoch Times.

Support is widespread across generations and throughout Iranian communities around the world, she said, emphasizing efforts to raise awareness about the individuals killed and victimized by the regime for protesting atrocities.

Many cheered the announced death of Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who served as president of Iran from 1981 to 1989 before taking over as supreme leader in 1989 following the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

“Iranian civilians are and have been begging for this,” Yadegari said. “People are dancing in the streets. Children are cheering and praising Trump and [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu.”



▲ A woman holds a portrait of U.S. President Donald Trump as members of the Iranian community celebrate U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran, in Los Angeles on Feb. 28, 2026.

How Operation Epic Fury Unfolded

US military needed less than 10 hours to launch attack after president gave the ‘go order’

Continued from A1

With that request, the countdown to Operation Epic Fury kicked off. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair Gen. Dan Caine told reporters during a March 2 press conference that with the president’s December request, the Pentagon began “setting the force and setting the theater” and shifted forces into place over the previous 30 days to “provide the president with credible options should action be required.”

After U.S. negotiators, led by special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, left Geneva on Feb. 26 without concessions from Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, the die was cast.

The next day, the president called the Pentagon from Air Force One as it was en route to Corpus Christi, Texas, where he was scheduled to campaign for Republican primary candidates.

Caine recalled the exact moment he got the call: “H hour,” a military term for the time at which an operation begins, was 3:38 p.m. EST on Friday, Feb. 27, when the Pentagon “received the final go order from President Trump.”

“The president directed, and I quote: ‘Operation Epic Fury is approved. No aborts. Good luck.’” Caine said.

With that one call, he said, “across the globe, [U.S. military] operation centers came alive,” and Adm. Brad Cooper, Central Command commander at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, assumed operational command in the theater.

When Trump issued the “go order” at 3:38 p.m. Feb. 27, it was just after midnight Feb. 28 in Tehran. In the nearly 10 hours between H hour and the actual launch of the attack, Caine said, “in the region, every element of the joint force made their final preparations.”

“Air defense batteries readied themselves, checking their systems to respond to Iranian attacks,” he said. “Pilots and crews rehearsed their strike packages for the final time. Air crews began loading their final weapons, and two carrier strike groups began to move towards their launching point.”

“As dawn crept up, across the Central Command [area of operations], skies surged to life,” Caine said.

“More than 100 aircraft launched from land and sea—fighters, tankers, airborne early warning, electronic attack, bombers from the states, and unmanned platforms—forming a single synchronized wave.”

That wave arrived over Iran at 1:15 a.m. EST, 9:45 a.m. in Tehran.

That timeline was accelerated by “a



trigger event conducted by the Israeli Defense Forces, enabled by the U.S. intelligence community” from the standard night attack to a mid-morning opening salvo that killed Iranian leader Ali Khamenei and up to 48 of the nation’s military leaders at a Tehran compound.

That was among more than 1,000 targets struck in the first 24 hours of the aerial, missile, and drone assault.

“The full strength of America’s armed forces came together in a unified purpose against a capable and determined adversary,” Caine said.

“This deployment included thousands of service members from all branches, hundreds of advanced fourth- and fifth-generation fighters, dozens of refueling tankers, the Lincoln and Ford carrier strike groups and their embarked air wings, sustained flow of munitions, fuel supplies ... all supported with command and control, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance network. And the flow of forces continues today.”

The nation’s highest-ranking military officer laid out the order of battle and what forces, as of March 2, were engaged in Operation Epic Fury, a rapid assembly of forces that “demonstrated the joint forces ability to adapt and project power at the time and place of [the United States] choosing” that included “several combat firsts” to be made public “at some point in the future.”

Before the first missile struck, Caine said, “the first movers” were Space Force, Army, and Air Force electronics and cyber warfare technicians “layering non-kinetic effects, disrupting and degrading and blinding Iran’s ability to see, communicate, and respond.”

With Iranian communications disrupted and its air defenses “without the ability to see, coordinate, or respond effectively,” U.S. and Israeli air forces, with “swift, precise, and overwhelming strikes,” established local air superiority immediately, he said, setting the stage for a campaign the Pentagon maintains it can sustain, and expand if needed, for weeks.

Combat Firsts

With Iranian air defenses hacked or blinded before the opening salvo, the assault began with waves of Tomahawk cruise missiles—long-range precision weapons capable of striking targets



▲ Rescuers search through the rubble of a collapsed building at the site of a strike in Tehran, Iran, on Feb. 28, 2026.

hundreds of miles inland—launched by the aircraft carriers USS Abraham Lincoln in the Arabian Sea and USS Gerald R. Ford in the eastern Mediterranean Sea and their battlegroup destroyers.

The USS Gerald R. Ford, which had been deployed to the region in June 2025 during the 12-Day War that badly damaged, but did not destroy, Iran’s uranium enrichment program and was then dispatched to the southern Caribbean to lead Operation Southern Spear off Venezuela, was ordered back to the Sixth Fleet in January and is now in its eighth month of sustained operations.

It is to be relieved eventually by the USS George H.W. Bush, a Nimitz-class carrier undergoing post-overhaul sea trials.

With missiles outbound, hundreds of Air Force F-15s, F-16s, and stealth F-22 Raptors merged with carrier-launched F/A-18 Hornets, stealth F-35s, and EA-18G electronic warfare jets in the massive aerial attack against Iranian air defenses and missile-launch sites.

The fighters were later joined by Air Force stealth B-2 Spirit bombers that flew 17 hours from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, which had struck suspected nuclear complexes with 30,000-pound “penetrator” munitions in June 2025.

In the opening phases of the Feb. 28

assault, they targeted ballistic missile sites with 2,000-pound precision-guided bombs, confirming that the focus was on degrading Iran’s air defenses and communications.

Ground-based Army precision strike missiles from the M142 high-mobility artillery rocket system mounted on “shoot and scoot” mobile launchers added to the fray, lobbing short-range ballistics into Iran from bases in the Gulf states, the first time the short-range ballistic missile system was used in combat.

The Pentagon has acknowledged that Operation Epic Fury is also the debut of a new low-cost uncrewed combat attack system (LUCAS) drone—a one-way “suicide” drone reverse-engineered to mimic Iran’s Shahed 136 drone, which it has exported en masse to Russia for use in Ukraine.

Among the forces participating in the attack are Air Force MQ-9 Reaper drones carrying Hellfire missiles and guided bombs, twin-engine A-10 attack aircraft directed by E-3 Sentry and E-2 Hawkeye airborne surveillance and EA-11A BACN “Wi-Fi in the sky” reconnaissance jets, and KC-135 and KC-46 aerial refueling tankers.

Under attack from Iranian and Shia militias, there are about 2,400 U.S. soldiers in Syria and Iraq, including in Erbil, Iraq.

About 2,000 are from the Iowa National Guard, who are to be relieved by a unit from the 10th Mountain Division this spring.

At least 250 guardsmen left Iraq in mid-February, and on Feb. 27—before the attack was launched—the Iowa Na-

U.S. NAVY



ATTA KENARE / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ A plume of smoke rises after a strike in Tehran, Iran, on March 3, 2026.



▲ (Above left) Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force Gen. Dan Caine speaks at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla., on Feb. 28, 2026, during Operation Epic Fury. (Above right) Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Bulkeley fires a Tomahawk Land Attack Missile during operations in support of Operation Epic Fury on Feb. 28, 2026.

DANIEL TOROK/WHITE HOUSE VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ President Donald Trump (2nd L) oversees Operation Epic Fury with (L-R) CIA Director John Ratcliffe, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles, at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla., on Feb. 28, 2026.

tional Guard announced that 650 more were headed home.

It is uncertain what their status is now.

The U.S. base in Erbil is among installations across the region under sporadic Iranian and militia attacks.

Trump and War Secretary Pete Hegseth have not ruled out dispatching “boots on the ground,” although there is no indication that Army and Marine infantry forces have been ordered to deploy.

There are two Marine Expeditionary Units, each with 2,500 assault troops, now at sea, but they are not near the Middle East.

Marines aboard the USS Iwo Jima remain in the Caribbean off Venezuela, and those aboard the USS Tripoli are operating with the USS Washington’s carrier battle group in the western Pacific.

If conventional ground troops are dispatched, the first forces will likely come from the 82nd Airborne Division and XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, or the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Other Army units geared to rapidly deploy include the Fourth Infantry Division at Fort Carson, Colorado, and 10th Mountain Division units training at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

But Caine told reporters on March 2 that although “boots on the ground” is always an option, it is not at the top of the deck of cards that Pentagon planners have at hand.

The next phase, after degrading Iranian defenses, “allows aerial forces to mass for the big wave that is coming,” he said.

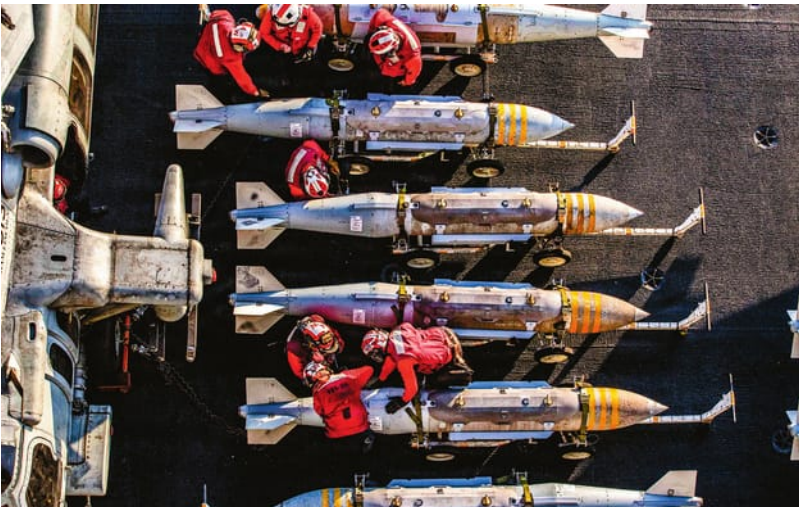
PLEIADES NEO (C) AIRBUS DS 2026/HANDOUT VIA REUTERS



U.S. NAVY



U.S. NAVY PHOTO



U.S. NAVY VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ (Clockwise from left) A satellite image shows black smoke rising and heavy damage at Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s compound in Tehran, Iran, on Feb. 28, 2026; U.S. sailors load an F/A-18E Super Hornet aircraft with ammunition on aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford on Feb. 28, 2026; U.S. sailors prepare to stage ordnance on the flight deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln on Feb. 28, 2026; A U.S. sailor signals the launch of an MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter on the flight deck of the USS Gerald R. Ford on Feb. 28, 2026.





MADALINA KILOV/THE EPOCH TIMES



JOHN FREDRICKS/THE EPOCH TIMES

▲ Federal agents monitor protesters as they gather in front of ICE offices in Portland, Oregon, on Oct. 4, 2025.



JOHN FREDRICKS/THE EPOCH TIMES

▲ Protesters taunt federal officers in front of the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building in Minneapolis on Jan. 11, 2026.

In Pursuit of Revolution

Nationwide, networks are recruiting, training, and mobilizing anti-ICE activists; they also manage media relations and enlist legal aid, their websites show.

Generally, these groups express a shared goal: stopping immigration-enforcers from making arrests, which activists routinely call “kidnappings” or “abductions.”

Several ICE-opposing organizations also openly crusade for a bigger result: political revolution against Trump.

Revolutionary Communists of America wrote in a March 2025 statement on its website that it is trying “to build a communist party that can lead the working class to power, tearing down not only Trump but also the liberals and the entire capitalist system.”

Socialist groups have espoused similar aspirations in recent months.

A youth-led activist group, Sunrise Movement, wants Trump “kicked out of power,” said Aru Shiney-Ajay, a Minnesotan who serves as its executive director.

In the meantime, Sunrise Movement is trying to make Trump’s actions “backfire” this year, Shiney-Ajay said during a Jan. 28 online meeting about ICE-opposition efforts.

Old Tactics, New Tech

Anti-ICE groups’ methods mirror those that have been used by insurgents around the world for decades—but supercharged with new technology.

“It’s all really old tactics that are just modernized for the digital age,” Waller said. “The battle is being fought in the digital sphere. That’s where people are going to get riled up, both to join the insurgency and to become radicalized.”

Waller said he has closely followed the work of Higby and others who are mounting an online counterattack.

Although a number of tactics were unknown to outsiders until Higby reported on them, some activists have disclosed considerable information.

Upon confirming an ICE presence, activists send out electronic messages summoning protesters or “rapid responders” to come to the scene.

St. Paul City Councilmember Hwa Jeong Kim has served in that role. She allowed an Axios journalist to report on her rapid-response duties one day in late January.

“Constitutional observation is, in my mind, a type of nonviolent, peaceful protesting,” Kim told Axios.

After arriving at ICE scenes, rapid responders honk car horns and blow whistles. Those sounds warn potential immigration enforcement targets to stay away while protesters spill into the streets and use their cellphones to record officers’ actions. Activists believe that the commotion may deter agents from taking more people into custody, Kim told Axios.

“Trained legal observers” video-record

ICE interactions. Some activists may then post the footage online. The footage also could become evidence in court cases.

Meanwhile, activist networks gather information on ICE agents and their vehicles; some make the information public, which can lead to threats and actual attacks against the officers.

Physical Tactics Include ‘De-Arresting’

Sometimes, activists use vehicles or their own bodies to block ICE agents or even assault them.

Homeland Security has reported that increasing numbers of vehicles are being used to attack ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection personnel. That escalation began shortly after January 2025, when Trump launched an illegal-immigration crackdown as a cornerstone of his second presidency.

Anti-ICE forces also have targeted independent reporters, including Higby. On Jan. 12, he was with fellow reporter and influencer Nick Sortor when activists surrounded their Jeep, spray-painted it, smashed its windows, and threatened them; Sortor called 911 and drove away.

Some activists, if given the chance, may try to free a suspect caught by ICE. That practice, known as “de-arresting” or “un-arresting” someone, dates to the 1960s. Its use became more organized under Antifa and anarchist “black bloc” movements in the 1980s.

Techniques can include opening car doors to release arrestees, grabbing the arrested person, or “pulling and pushing” an officer to break his grip, according to a “De-Arrest Primer” posted on an anarchist blog.

That primer, dated 2024, was used during a recent New York City training of anti-ICE activists, according to Manhattan Institute investigative analyst Stu Smith. He posted a video from the training on X.

Hidden Methods Exposed

In a newer twist to their methods, activist networks are using encrypted messaging apps such as Signal to keep communications secret.

Higby’s posts show videos and screenshots of Signal chats, revealing how activists track ICE, send out alerts, and assign disruptors to various roles. Organizers frequently delete messages and start new daily chats to avoid detection, he reported.

In addition, anti-ICE groups are using a method established in the military to standardize how they report on ICE called SALUTE, which stands for “size, action, location, uniform, time, equipment.”

That procedure and others used in the Signal groups are outlined in a “best practices” guide available online; its authorship is undisclosed, but The Epoch Times found that multiple activist groups linked to versions of it.

Many ICE-watching Signal groups exist in Minnesota, each with up to 1,000

members, Higby reported in a viral Jan. 24 video that drew more than 23 million views on X and prompted the FBI to launch an investigation.

In response to Higby’s findings, retired Green Beret Eric Schwalm of Georgia wrote on X, “When your own citizens build and operate this level of parallel intelligence and rapid-response network against federal officers... you’re no longer dealing with civil disobedience.”

“The most sobering part?” he wrote. “It’s domestic. Funded, trained (somewhere), and directed by people who live in the same country they’re trying to paralyze law enforcement in.”

Schwalm also wrote an article on X describing a “seismic shift” in protesters’ tactics.

“These aren’t the stationary rallies or sit-ins of past movements like Occupy Wall Street or even the 2020 Black Lives Matter marches,” he wrote.

Instead, he said, civilian activists are using “tactics that echo” those that special forces use.

And, he said, a group called States at the Core launched a hub in 2024 to support anti-ICE efforts. The organization now has spread across more than 20 states. It holds frequent training sessions that may draw more than 1,000 online attendees apiece.

The group has learned to strategically escalate its actions while staying “legal yet effective,” Schwalm wrote.

“By bordering on interference,” the activists deter or delay ICE operations, he said, and they have formed “credible, measured forces building resilient cadres.”

‘Insurgents’ or ‘Defenders’?

Critics refer to some aggressive, organized anti-ICE activists as “agitators,” “insurgents,” or “insurrectionists.”

Supporters call them “protectors,” “defenders,” or “resisters.” Some even call anti-ICE forces “abolitionists,” likening ICE immigration sweeps to patrols that scooped up fugitive slaves before the United States abolished slavery in 1865.

Regardless of how its players are labeled, the current anti-ICE movement has become significant in size, scope, and influence.

Defend the 612, named after a Minneapolis area code, states that “hundreds of thousands” have joined its mission to oust ICE from Minnesota.

But a U.S. government counter-insurgency guide cautions, “Insurgents may be deliberately deceptive of their goals, support levels, and strength.”

The guide from the Joint Chiefs of Staff states that insurgents also may lie about “abuses by counterinsurgents and mask their own.”

Shiney-Ajay said during her late January online meeting, “Five percent of every neighborhood in Minneapolis is currently in a Signal chat organizing for ICE patrols.”

She said that about 200,000 people joined an ICE-watch training following outrage over the fatal shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, both 37, in January.

Good and Pretti, both protesters and U.S. citizens, were shot and killed in separate confrontations with federal officers attempting to arrest immigration-law offenders.

The Epoch Times was unable to independently verify published reports alleging that the pair were trained ICE-watchers.

Service Providers Targeted

Shiney-Ajay said ICE-opposition training sessions are being conducted “constantly” and that people are being taught to “target the institutions that are upholding ICE.”

These include the hotels, rental-car agencies, restaurants, and food-delivery services that ICE agents use, she said.

“Those are all things that ordinary people have control over,” Shiney-Ajay said, urging people to refuse service to agents or take action

against service providers.

Addressing ICE, she said, “We’re not going to stay home in our houses when you grab our neighbors.”

Shiney-Ajay said Sunrise Movement hopes to expand its “No Sleep for ICE” campaign nationwide. That initiative calls for activists to make a ruckus outside hotels where ICE agents are believed to be staying.

In Minnesota, some hotels responded by evicting ICE agents or closing temporarily; several were vandalized.

Dilemma for Trump Administration

If the Trump administration adopts an attitude of leaving Minnesota to the Minnesotans and bails out, “it is a retreat, and it gives the insurgents a victory,” Waller said.

But if the administration says it will enforce federal law regardless of what the local authorities say, that sets the stage for tensions to persist or escalate, he said.

“After someone is killed, the public typically responds with anger toward the government,” Waller said, noting that some reports used terms such as “a mom” and “a nurse” to describe Good and Pretti after they were fatally shot in January.

“But, of course, these people are more than just moms and nurses,” he said. “They’re actual committed agitators, right?”

Savannah Hulsey-Pointer contributed to this report.



WORLD



Canada and Greenland have signed a nonbinding cooperation pact on critical minerals that Ottawa says will boost “North–North” cooperation and build economic health and energy security.



“Enduring peace will be achieved when knowledge and understanding are fully valued within all societies.”
U.S. First Lady Melania Trump, calling on world leaders at the UN Security Council to prioritize education and technology to create lasting global security



▲ A map showing key Chinese infrastructure projects in Latin America based on public records and information from Chinese government websites or project pages.

Mapping China’s Influence in Latin America

Secret meetings leading to Peruvian president’s ouster after just four months highlight China’s influence in America’s backyard

By Eva Fu

The ouster of Peru’s president began with a secret late-night dinner. A series of clandestine encounters followed—dark glasses at one meeting, a hood over his face at another.

Then videos leaked. Amid a nation-wide uproar, three-quarters of Peru’s lawmakers voted to censure the initially popular José Jerí, just four months into his presidency. He was the country’s seventh leader in 10 years.

“We ask to end this agony so we can truly create the transition citizens are hoping for,” said Ruth Luque, one of 75 lawmakers who voted to oust Jerí. “Not a transition with hidden interests, influence-peddling, secret meetings, and hooded figures. We don’t want that sort of transition.”

The man meeting with Jerí was Chinese restaurant and wholesale store owner Yang Zhihua, who is behind several major Chinese infrastructure deals in the country.

Dubbed “Chifagate,” a nod to fusion Peruvian Chinese cuisine, the scandal has thrown another wrinkle into an already strained relationship between the two countries.

Currently, Lima is fighting to regain oversight over a major China-controlled port in Chancay, Peru, which has become a symbol of China’s footprint in Latin America.

60% of
PHONE BRANDS
Chinese phone brands now command more than 60 percent of the Latin American market, data show.

Across the region, a deeply entrenched web of Chinese influence is enabling the communist regime to redefine dynamics in America’s backyard.

Starting with near-negligible investment levels in 2000, China has become a dominant force in Latin America and the Caribbean, with trade exceeding \$500 billion in 2024. For many individual nations, including Brazil and Peru, China has overtaken the United States as a key trading partner.

Along the way, Beijing has built enormous leverage, said Ding Hung-bin, associate dean at Loyola University Maryland’s Sellinger School of Business and Management.

“The Chinese Communist Party is playing the long game in Latin America,” he told The Epoch Times.

With the money pouring in, Ding said, Beijing reaps political influence, biding its time to challenge the U.S.-led world order. After two decades, he said, “the fire has reached the U.S. doorstep.”

Washington is now making it clear that this cannot continue. In its national security strategy released in November 2025, the Trump administration made the region its top priority, saying that it was a “great American strategic mistake of recent decades” to allow “non-Hemispheric competitors” to take hold in the Western Hemisphere.

The past inaction, the document reads, has cost the United States both “eco-

nomically in the present” and “strategically in the future.”

Within weeks of the strategy being released, U.S. forces captured Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro and brought that country’s courtship with China to a halt.

Just hours before his capture, Maduro hosted a Chinese envoy at the presidential palace. He accepted a porcelain vase and posed for photos with the Chinese delegates, then proclaimed on social media that the meeting reaffirmed the two countries’ “strong bonds of brotherhood” through “thick and thin.”

The Digital Silk Road
The “brotherhood” is Beijing’s lever.

In September 2025, Maduro proudly showed off a foldable, red Huawei phone that he used daily—a gift from Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

Maduro hailed it as the “best phone in the world.”

“Americans can’t hack it,” he told reporters.

To China, it was a validating moment in the regime’s battle for technological supremacy, with Huawei leading the way.

Blacklisted in the United States, the Chinese telecom provider has been deepening its foothold in other parts of the Americas. It spearheads the Digital Silk Road, a core element of Beijing’s trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative aimed at stretching the regime’s power

and influence around the globe.

Huawei’s data storage platform now covers every Latin American country, boasting the fastest business growth among telecoms. The significance of that sank in when Brazil sought to block Huawei from its 5G networks on national security grounds in 2020. Huawei’s technology was already embedded in the country’s telecom architecture; replacing it would have cost billions of dollars.

In 2022, Huawei signed a deal to turn Curitiba in southern Brazil into a 5G-powered smart city, integrating artificial intelligence and big data into various aspects of urban life, from medical surgeries to public security. Its website now features an interview with the city’s mayor, who touted Curitiba as a “smart city that works for its citizens.”

And Huawei is not the only Chinese entity expanding in the region. Market research data from Canalys show that Chinese phone brands now command more than 60 percent of the Latin American market.

In Ecuador, the China-made ECU911 system powers up surveillance cameras nationwide that feed real-time footage to a thousands-strong police unit, which deals with everything from traffic to national security. Touting its scale of impact, Xi once called it a “calling card for China—Latin America’s high tech collaboration.”



By law, Chinese companies have no choice but to hand over whatever they have if the Chinese Communist Party asks. And that makes their ubiquitousness problematic, said Evan Ellis, Latin American studies research professor at the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute.

With all the data coming out of corporate boardrooms, factory floors, and people's homes, the key question is where they get offloaded, he told The Epoch Times. The presence of Chinese technology in federal agencies across the region, he said, "opens up government officials to blackmail."

‘Predatory’ Investments

Beijing has a phrase for its vision: the "China-Latin America community with a shared future."

Xi was the first to evoke the term. Addressing Brazil's National Congress in 2014, he compared the China-Latin America relationship to wine—something that "grows better as it ages."

The idea here is to "rebuild from the roots, pulling the 33 Latin America and Caribbean nations together with China while keeping America out," Florencia Huang, a professor specializing in Latin American studies at Taiwan's Tamkang University, told The Epoch Times.

Under that banner, China attracted more than 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries to join the Belt and Road Initiative partnerships. Hundreds of infrastructure projects followed.

Chancay Port, a \$1.3 billion project nearly 50 miles from Lima, is at the top of that list. The deepwater port, covering about 445 acres of Peruvian territory, is the primary Chinese logistics hub on the Pacific side of Latin America. Its strategic positioning directly links South America to China, cutting shipping time by nearly half while facilitating Beijing's access to minerals critical to its industrial demand.

Chinese shipping giant COSCO has 30 years of exclusive operating rights to the port. The Peruvian port authority blamed this on an "administrative error" in 2024. But its bid to void the terms quickly fizzled out; the country's congress approved changes that legalized the COSCO deal.

In a further win for COSCO, a Peruvian court on Jan. 29 restricted state oversight of the terminal's operations. The United States warned that Peru could lose sovereignty of "critical infrastructure in its own territory" to "predatory Chinese owners."

"Let this be a cautionary tale for the region and the world: cheap Chinese money costs sovereignty," the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs wrote in a February statement.

"Predatory" is also what Ellis calls development projects such as Chancay, one of about 40 ports with Chinese investment in Latin America. Similar Chinese dominance repeats in sectors such as critical mineral extraction, logistics, and renewable energy.

A common pattern here, according to Ellis, is to first secure market access in strategic sectors, then control the supply chain.

"If you want access to the cheapest, fastest route, you need to cooperate with the Chinese," Ellis said. "It gives them leverage."

Then, little by little, he said, they can push other shipping alliances out of business and capture the most important trans-Pacific routes for themselves.

As a state-owned enterprise, COSCO has worked closely with the People's Liberation Army (PLA), providing logistical support in both Lebanon and Yemen in the 2010s.

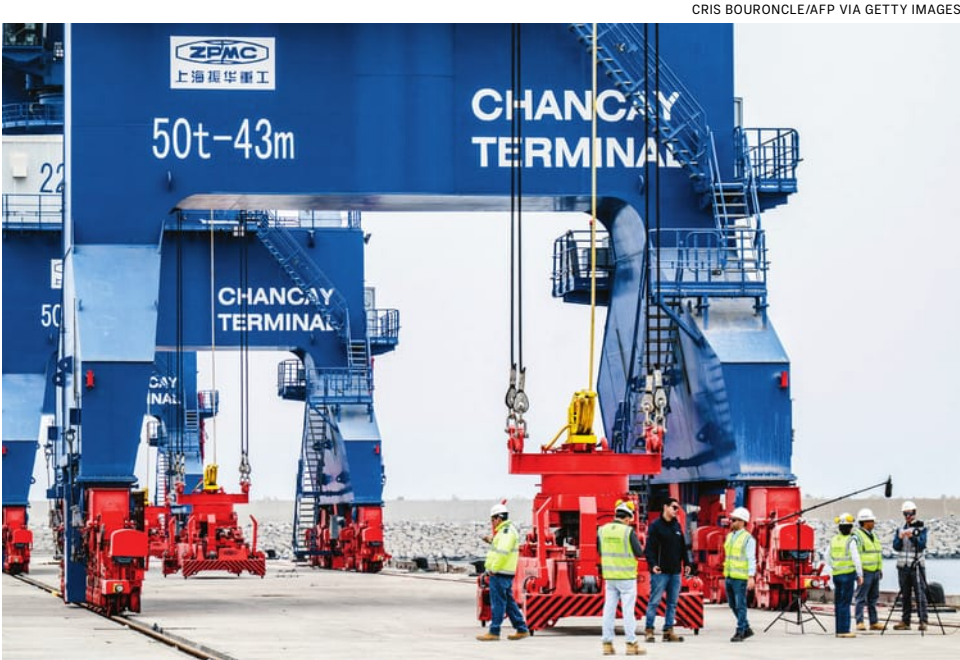
In the event of a military crisis—say, a conflict with the United States in the Indo-Pacific—COSCO's officials would "use their exclusive control over that port in any way they could to resupply PLA warships," Ellis said.

COSCO did not respond by press time to a request for comment.

A Broad Fishing Net

In the heart of Argentina's Patagonian desert, behind an eight-foot barbed-wire fence, a Chinese entity subordinate to the PLA's strategic support force runs a seclusive space station. Access to outsiders is by appointment only.

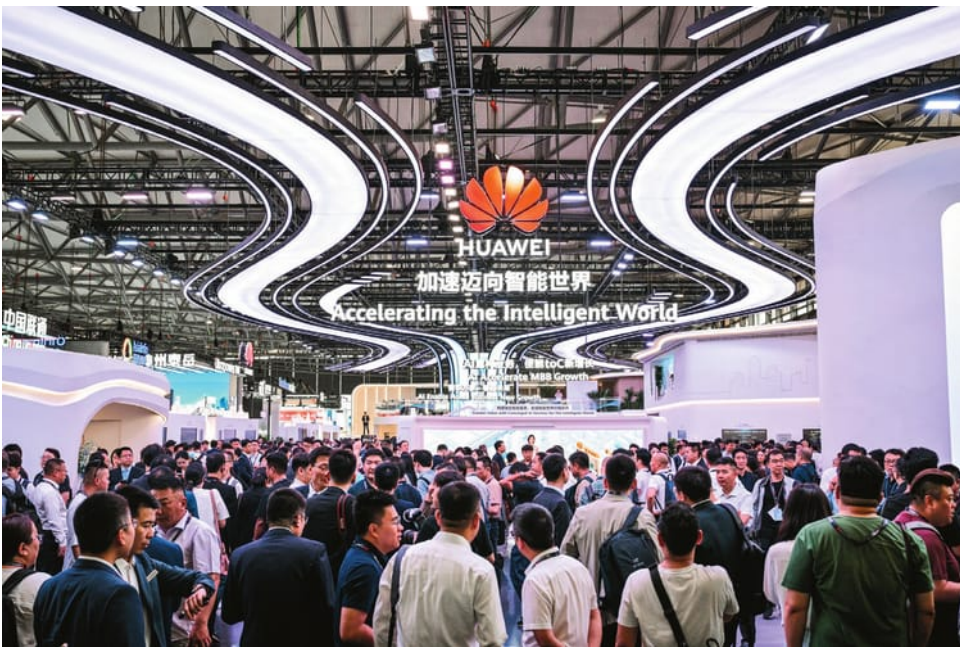
Within roughly 100 miles of the Florida shore, four strategically located Cuban sites alleged to have ties with China hold antennas and other gear that can collect intelligence on the United States, according to satellite imagery analysis. Of them, at least one underwent new upgrades in 2025 that



▲ Workers at the "megaport" in the small town of Chancay, Peru, on Oct. 29, 2024.



▲ Interim Peruvian President José Jerí (C) walks to a meeting with transport union leaders during a strike in Lima, Peru, on Jan. 14, 2026.



▲ People visit the Huawei booth during the Mobile World Congress in Shanghai on June 18, 2025.

could significantly enhance its surveillance capabilities, the Center for Strategic and International Studies said.

Covert intelligence gathering and dual-use facilities are far from the sole avenues for China in building an edge. More prominent—and apparently successful—are the regime's broad overtures to foster ties on a personal level.

China's senior military leaders have visited the region hundreds of times in the past two decades, according to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. Concurrent with these activities was a stream of military exchanges, joint drills, and arms sales.

Beijing also heaped on incentives, offering Latin American military officers free training, business-class travel, and five-star hotel stays in China, the RAND think tank wrote in a 2022 Pentagon-sponsored research paper.

Through a state-directed program called "Bridge of the Future," Beijing brought more than 1,000 Latin political dignitaries and "young leaders" on China trips, Chinese government records show.

Wang Yi, Chinese foreign minister, said in May 2025 that Beijing intended to invite 300 Latin American delegates in each of the following three years.

And such efforts have paid off.

A Honduran congressional staffer, during a 2023 trip to a Party "red tourism" village, gushed to Chinese state media outlets about China's poverty alleviation campaign, saying that the regime had created a "miracle in human history."

Other testimonials from Latin American officials abound, with an Argentinian colonel praising the Belt and Road Initiative and a major general crediting the regime's COVID-19 control measures with "buying the West time."

For a clue as to how much the regime values these programs, look no further than the Chinese white paper that dovetailed the U.S. national security

strategy. Ellis said that as he read the document, it amazed him "how many different programs there are for people at all levels."

"The Chinese cast their fishing nets very broadly," he said.

"It's like sowing seeds," he stated. Only a small portion of those people may go on to be important, but for that small subset, he said, "it opens up the door to other more nefarious relationships."

Ellis said he has observed it in his own social circle. A Panamanian friend got a four-year scholarship to study at China's state-affiliated Fudan University. When Ellis ran into him again years later, the Chinese university graduate had become Panama's technical representative, taking part in free trade negotiations with Beijing.

Let this be a cautionary tale for the region and the world: cheap Chinese money costs sovereignty.

Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, U.S. Department of State

Nicole Wong, who previously served as general director of foreign policy for the Panamanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is another such example, according to Ellis. Also Panamanian, Wong studied Chinese at Jinan University, a school directly under the Party's global influence-disseminating arm known as the United Front Work Department. The school in 2018 became a designated training ground for instructors before their departure to overseas Confucius Institutes, another united front program that disseminates Chinese propaganda in the guise of language teaching.

In 2017, Wong played a key role in steering Panama toward China and away from Taiwan. Later, on Chinese

state media, she claimed credit for the "Panama model" for El Salvador and the Dominican Republic; both countries followed Panama's footsteps in severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 2018. After leaving the Panamanian government, Wong did a stint with China Harbour Engineering Co. Americas, advising the Chinese state construction firm as it embarked on a series of infrastructure initiatives across Latin America.

Ellis described Wong as a "brilliant" person who "just kind of got sucked into this web of Chinese influence."

"It's not that the two years in China made her a Chinese agent, but it may have shaped her to see China in a positive way and built relationships that probably deepened as she then became more important," he said.

Wong and China Harbour Engineering Co. Americas did not respond by press time to requests for comment.

The Pendulum Swings

The political climate in the region is now shifting against Beijing's favor.

Late 2025 ushered in a rising bloc of right-wing leaders whose ideology hews closer to the Trump administration than to China.

Ahead of Honduras's presidential election in late November, both leading candidates disparaged the country's decision to sever ties with Taiwan.

The 2023 move cost Honduras a lucrative market that had long been a lifeline to its shrimp industry. With Chinese buyers unable to fill the demand, Honduran shrimp exports plummeted by two-thirds, leading to more than 60 company closures and 14,000 job losses.

"We were 100 times better off with Taiwan," Honduran President Nasry Asfura, the country's new conservative leader, said before his December victory.

Honduras is likely not the only country feeling buyer's remorse, according to Paraguayan President Santiago Peña Palacios, a steadfast Taiwan ally in the region.

"A lot of the time, many of the leaders thought that having a relationship with China will open the market, the huge Chinese market," he told The Epoch Times in early 2025. "And the reality has been quite the opposite."

All of that means that the political pendulum is swinging back to the U.S. side, said Shen Ming-shih, a research fellow at Taiwan's Institute for National Defense and Security Research.

"China talks the talk," he told The Epoch Times. "But when the promises and expected checks don't deliver, the countries that once looked to China for help will turn to the United States or Taiwan."

Ellis said he shared Shen's view.

Latin America is "littered" with Chinese projects that have turned out "disastrously," he said.

The Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric project in Ecuador is, in his telling, "the supreme example of how a project can go hugely wrong." Despite a \$2.6 billion price tag, the China-built dam faced significant delays and chronic shutdowns. It has reported more than 17,000 cracks.

Working with China, Ellis said, is akin to "playing with fire."

"If you're very, very careful, maybe you can heat up your soup, but if you're not careful, you'll burn the house down," he said.

Beijing's failure to aid Maduro is another message to other Latin American countries that work with the Chinese regime, according to Ellis.

"China will make money off of you," he said. "But don't count on China to be there when you need [it]."

With the rightward turn comes an opportunity for the United States to reshuffle the cards. And Washington has been capitalizing on the momentum.

U.S. President Donald Trump has invited Latin American leaders to a March summit in Florida ahead of his trip to Beijing.

In recent months, at least six countries have inked trade or critical minerals agreements with the United States.

Panama in January canceled contracts that allowed Hong Kong's CK Hutchison to operate two strategic ports on its canal. Six Latin American nations joined the United States in issuing a statement of support.

At a recent investor conference in São Paulo, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the administration is working on "retaking sovereignty" from China in strategic sectors.

And in Latin America, he said, there is a "generational opportunity" to strengthen ties for governments that are open to it.

Yi Ru contributed to this report.



▲ The dance piece “Flowing Sleeves,” from the 2009 Shen Yun Performing Arts program.

6 World Leaders Threatened in China-Linked Campaign Against Shen Yun

Chinese email threats sent against leaders of Australia, Taiwan, Canada, Italy, Denmark, and South Korea

Continued from A1

with the performance.”
A Jan. 8 email reads: “Won’t rule out shooting Lai Ching-te! Or even crashing an explosives-loaded SUV into the Presidential Office Building. Go on if you don’t believe me.”
Another Feb. 10 email reads: “If you don’t care about Mette Frederiksen and all Danish high-ranking officials’ personal safety, then go ahead with the performance. I don’t care, as long as you can afford the consequences.”

An Escalating Campaign
While none of the threats turned out to be real, they represent an escalation of a decades-long campaign targeting the New York-based performing arts company.
Performing under the slogan “China Before Communism,” Shen Yun depicts traditional Chinese culture through classical Chinese dance and music. Each year, it performs for a global live audience of about 1 million people. The Epoch Times

It also clearly demonstrates how terrified Beijing is that we expose the tyranny of the CCP on stages around the world.

Ying Chen, vice president, Shen Yun

is a media sponsor of Shen Yun.
The performing arts company was founded by practitioners of Falun Gong, a spiritual group severely persecuted in China by the Chinese Communist Party. Shen Yun, since its inception in 2006, has faced a sabotage campaign from the regime that deploys tactics such as diplomatic and economic coercion to stop its performances.
The threat emails mark a new form of sabotage. Last year, a similar threat resulted in an evacuation at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, now named the Trump Kennedy Center.
After first surfacing about two years ago, the threats now total more than 130 and counting, according to the Falun Dafa Information Center. The actors behind them began by targeting both Shen Yun’s performers and their families, as well as the company’s training facilities.
They also threatened U.S. lawmakers, the White House, and theaters and insti-

tutions globally, often describing possible bombings or mass shootings as consequences should the show go on.
Taiwanese authorities, in a multiagency investigation, linked some of the emails to Xi’an, China, with a research facility for tech giant Huawei—which is blacklisted in the United States over national security concerns—as a prime suspect.

National Security Concerns
An Australian federal investigation is now putting the latest round of intimidation in the spotlight.
Law enforcement ushered Albanese to another location for hours as they searched The Lodge in Canberra, Australia, ultimately finding no threat to public safety.
The Australian Federal Police are probing a second email dated Feb. 22, in which the sender claimed to have placed explosives that would blow The Lodge “into ruins.”
Queensland Police are investigating another bomb threat to a venue on the Gold Coast that forced staff to evacuate.
To Lucy Zhao, president of the Falun Dafa Association of Australia, the situation highlights a dangerous trajectory that “warrants urgent attention at the highest levels of government.”
“When threats extend to a nation’s elected leader, this is no longer solely a matter of religious freedom or artistic expression—it becomes a direct challenge to national sovereignty, democratic governance, and public safety,” she said in a statement.
“Democracies cannot permit foreign authoritarian regimes to export coercion, intimidation, and fear onto their soil.”
The Chinese link behind the incident garnered international media attention after The Epoch Times broke the story.
When asked about the threats against



▲ Chen Ying, vice president and conductor at Shen Yun Performing Arts, speaks during an interview with The Epoch Times’ sister media NTD in New York on Nov. 27, 2024.

Australia’s prime minister during a press briefing in Beijing, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry dodged the question, saying that she had noted the relevant reports but was “not aware of the actual situation.” She then went on to use derogatory terms to attack Shen Yun and Falun Gong.
The exchange, curiously, was later scrubbed from the official transcript on the ministry’s website. However, that order did not appear to filter down to the Chinese Embassy in Australia, which went on to publish the entire exchange on its Facebook page.
Shen Yun says it won’t be deterred.
“The fact that they’re threatening the lives of world leaders to cancel Shen Yun

demonstrates the level of thuggery and desperation the CCP has resorted to,” Shen Yun Vice President Ying Chen told The Epoch Times.
“It also clearly demonstrates how terrified Beijing is that we expose the tyranny of the CCP on stages around the world.”

Pressure, Push Back
Australian parliamentarian Barnaby Joyce said the threats were an affront to what his country stands for.
“It is totally unacceptable in Australia to intimidate someone who is practicing their religion in a form that is no threat to Australian culture and does not intrude on the rights of others,” he told The Epoch Times.
When the Chinese Embassy in Denmark recently issued a statement telling people not to see Shen Yun, local lawmakers also pushed back.
“I would be ashamed if I listened to what the communist dictator in China says and thinks when participating in various events,” Danish People’s Party lawmaker Mikkell Bjorn said.
Danish Liberal Party lawmaker Kim Valentin said the Chinese regime’s actions only underscore its desire for control.
“In Denmark, the state does not interfere in what you should and should not participate in,” he said. “I was just reminded of that—that you don’t have that freedom in China.”
“I really hope this means that many more people will want to watch Shen Yun’s performance.”
Carl Andersen of the Liberal Alliance Party, who also sits on the Danish Parliament’s Ecclesiastical Affairs Committee, condemned the Chinese Embassy for engaging in “foreign interference.”
Andersen said he has reported the threats against the Danish leader to the country’s intelligence agency and police for investigation.
The Danes need to “stand against such pressure from authoritarian regimes,” he said.

◀ Emails sent to Shen Yun’s ticketing services targeting Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung on Jan. 8, 2026, and Feb. 10, 2026, respectively; emails sent to Shen Yun presenters targeting Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Italian President Sergio Mattarella, and Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, on Feb. 10, 2026.



China Ramping Up Nuclear-Powered Submarine Production: US Naval Intelligence

By 2040, CCP naval power ‘may credibly challenge U.S. regional maritime dominance,’ Pentagon official says

By Catherine Yang

China has “dramatically increased” domestic submarine production and is undergoing a shift “to all-nuclear construction,” according to testimony prepared by Rear Adm. Mike Brookes, commander of the Office of Naval Intelligence, for a congressional panel on March 2.

The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission is hosting hearings on March 2 about China’s growing maritime capabilities, which the commission’s chair, Randall Schriver, stated were testing the global order both on the seas and beneath it.

“China is advancing a growing fleet of increasingly capable submarines, unmanned underwater vehicles, seabed sensors, and sophisticated oceanographic mapping programs,” Schriver said.

Brookes said in his opening testimony that China currently operates more than 60 submarines, one of the world’s largest fleets. Of the 60, six are nuclear-powered attack submarines, at least two are nuclear-powered guided missile submarines, and six are nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines. Then there are 50-plus diesel-electric vessels.

According to his testimony, China made major investments in three shipyards beginning in 2010, allowing production to significantly accelerate.

“These expansions include the construction of expansive facilities that have tripled construction hall capacity, enabling higher production rates for conventional submarines, while upgraded infrastructure now accommodates the construction of larger diameter, advanced submarines across all three facilities,” he said.

Brookes said the shift to nuclear was a strategic and significant one, pointing to the development of a low-power nuclear submarine with greater endurance than a conventional submarine, which could be used to increase regional presence and patrols more economically.



PEDRO PARDO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

▲ People look at a submarine during a media tour organized by the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy in Qingdao, Shandong Province, China, on June 25, 2025.

Beijing is also developing autonomous undersea integrated sensors, weapons systems, and vehicles, Rear Adm. Mike Brookes said.



AFP/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

▲ A nuclear-powered submarine of the People’s Liberation Army Navy prepares to dive into the sea.

The ballistic missile submarines could target the United States “from within the first island chain,” as the Chinese Navy’s long-range precision strike capability has been enhanced in recent years, Brookes said.

He detailed a few models, including two expected to go into production in the late 2020s and through 2030.

“These submarines will incorporate substantial advancements in nuclear reactor design, sensor performance, weapons integration, and noise quieting technologies,” the statement reads. “The Type 096 SSBN equipped with JL-4 SLBMs will be able to target large portions of the U.S. from protected waters, fundamentally enhancing strategic deterrence credibility.”

China has also spent more than 20 years investing in unmanned undersea vehicles, and Brookes said Beijing is pursuing large vessels for “long-range mine countermeasures.”

Beijing is also developing autonomous undersea integrated sensors, weapons systems, and vehicles, he said, while building “layered undersea surveillance networks.”

Brookes estimated that China’s submarine fleet would grow to 70 by 2027 and to 80 by 2035, half of which would be nuclear-powered.

The commission also looked at China’s efforts to gain economic and strategic undersea advantages in addition to military and dual-use developments.

Brookes said that China holds the most seabed exploration contracts with the International Seabed Authority (ISA), which allow it to mine for critical minerals. He said that China already currently dominates the terrestrial critical mining

supply chain; extending this to the seabed would only increase various nations’ dependency on China.

He said that China is on the ISA council, makes major financial contributions to the ISA, and regularly hosts ISA events, giving it “significant influence over development of international seabed mining regulations” and decision-making. Beijing is also making deals with Pacific island nations to mine in their exclusive economic zones with an approach that “circumvents international regulatory frameworks while advancing its Belt and Road Initiative objectives.”

Chinese companies are simultaneously developing technology to advance undersea mining, including plans to test “collection vehicle maneuverability in water depths beyond 4,000 meters—the depth required for commercial mining operations in most target areas,” Brookes said.

He estimated that by 2040, the Chinese communist regime’s naval power “may credibly challenge U.S. regional maritime dominance, complicating crisis response, power projection, and allied defense.”

Brookes recommended that the United States maintain its undersea advantages with increased investment, innovation, and strategic focus.

CORRECTION

The article “A Turnaround for the Ages: Trump at State of the Union,” published in the Feb. 25–March 3 edition, misspelled the name of bartender and homeschooling mom Megan Hemhauser.

The Epoch Times regrets the error.

US to Cut Trade Ties With Spain Over Dispute

U.S. President Donald Trump said on March 3 that he has instructed Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to sever trade relations with Spain after the country’s leaders blocked the use of their military bases for U.S. forces.

Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares told Telectinco on March 2 that U.S. forces could not use Spanish bases to support ongoing operations against Iran.

“Spanish bases are not being used for this operation, and they will not be used for anything not included in the agreement with the United States or for anything that is not in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations,” Albares said.

Allies Shore Up Cyprus Following Drone Strike

European allies, including the UK, Greece, and France, are moving to reinforce Cyprus after a drone struck the British Royal Air Force Akrotiri base on the Mediterranean island on March 2 amid rising tensions across the Middle East.

The UK said on March 3 that it will be deploying helicopters with counter-drone capabilities and HMS Dragon, one of the Royal Navy’s six Type 45 air defence destroyers, in the region.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer made the announcement after speaking with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides.



YASUYOSHI CHIBA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

France Sends Aircraft Carrier to Mediterranean

France’s nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle has set sail for the Eastern Mediterranean under the orders of French President Emmanuel Macron.

Macron announced his decision in a pre-recorded speech aired on French TV on March 3.

Accompanied by its air assets and frigate escort, the Charles de Gaulle’s main objective is to act in defense of French assets in the Middle East as the entire region faces nondiscriminatory missile and drone attacks from Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

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Arts Center

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Steven Tanger Center for the Performing
Arts

Mar 7-8 · Raleigh, NC
Memorial Auditorium at Martin Marietta
Center for the Performing Arts

Mar 10-11 · Columbia, SC
Koger Center for the Arts

Mar 21-22 · Pittsburgh, PA
The Benedum Center for the Performing
Arts

Apr 10-12 · Boston, MA
Boch Center Wang Theatre

Apr 14-15 · Albany/Schenectady, NY
Proctors

Apr 15-19 · Philadelphia, PA
Miller Theater

Apr 18-19 · Portland, ME
Merrill Auditorium

Apr 18-19 · Baltimore, MD
The Hippodrome Theatre

Apr 19 · Norfolk, VA
Chrysler Hall

Apr 24-26 · New Brunswick, NJ
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What Have You Learned in 6 Hard Years?

Jeffrey A. Tucker | A14

Opinion

THE EPOCH TIMES

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Reality Check: Strain of the Welfare State, Housing, and Globalization

Tamuz Itai | A15



▲ An F/A-18E Super Hornet, attached to Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 14, prepares to launch from the flight deck of Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) in support of Operation Epic Fury, on March 2, 2026.

America's Iran War Is Off to a Strong Start

By Conrad Black



The Iran war is off to probably the best start of any war in modern history. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is frequently regarded as treacherous but overwhelmingly effective; it permanently eliminated two elderly U.S. battleships and severely damaged three others. But the beginning of the Iran war saw the elimination of almost the entire military and civilian leadership of the country, and within three days, the entire ocean-going Iranian Navy had been sunk. The Iranians, despite their customary dire threats, have been unable to land a single serious blow against surrounding U.S. bases or ships. The equivalent in December 1941 would have been the killing of then-President Franklin Roosevelt and his entire Cabinet and the military leadership, including Gens. George Marshall and Douglas MacArthur and Adm. Chester Nimitz, as well as the destruction of all of the country's 17 battleships and all (rather than none) of its aircraft carriers.

The opening actions in the Iraq wars of 1990 and 2003 eliminated Iraqi air defenses and forced the modest Iraqi Air Force to flee to neighboring countries, but they did not affect the Iraqi political and military leadership and were effectively a preparation for successful amphibious invasions of that country. As all readers know, the first war with Iraq did dislodge it from Kuwait but left Saddam Hussein in place. The second Gulf War led to the trial and execution of Saddam Hussein, but it also led to a very expensive and prolonged occupation of Iraq that was ultimately almost a complete failure and handed the principal influence over the Shiite majority of that country to Iran.

There has been a very insufficient recognition to date of the sophisticated strengthening of the U.S. ability to respond to unorthodox provocations. In 1941, Roosevelt warned that we "must al-

ways be wary of those who 'with sounding brass and tinkling cymbal' would preach the 'ism' of appeasement," and in his war message, he promised, "We will make very certain that this form of treachery [by Japan] shall never endanger us again."

These guidelines were consistently followed for the balance of the 20th century: The United States was never an appeasement power, and its military deterrence capability prevented any state from attacking it directly.

Eventually, the enemies of the West managed to lure the United States into a guerrilla war in Vietnam that proved very difficult to resolve at an acceptable cost in lives, time, and material commitment. Eventually, then-President Richard Nixon devised a method of handing the war to the South Vietnamese and providing them with the combat edge through heavy air support, even after an almost complete U.S. withdrawal on the ground. The spurious Watergate controversy, during which executive authority evaporated each day, prevented then-President Gerald Ford from resuming the bombing of North Vietnam after its invasion of the South in 1975.

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union produced comparative peace until terrorism crested with the suicide attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001. The United States responded

with its war on terror, beginning in Afghanistan, and later the invasion and occupation of Iraq, which was doomed to be a complete fiasco as soon as the occupiers dismissed the armed and police forces of the Iraqi government while permitting all the disemployed personnel to retain their weapons and their ordnance. A bloodbath ensued.

President Donald Trump was elected on a promise to avoid forever wars but also to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear military power, which had effectively been permitted, with a delay of 10 years, by the agreement negotiated by the Obama administration, which Trump revoked and Biden attempted unsuccessfully to revive. The current operation is dedicated to a profound eradication of the nuclear military potential of Iran, a complete removal of its ability through an almost unlimited number of conventional warhead missiles and drones to make it almost invulnerable to conventional attack, and to induce a fundamental change in Iranian policy, either through the elimination of the Islamist government or the promotion of a metamorphosis of that regime that amounts, at least in foreign policy terms, to regime change.

In the initial destruction of the Iranian nuclear capability, as with the abrupt removal of the Venezuelan leader and his wife—both actions being swiftly and very professionally executed with no U.S. fatalities—Trump demonstrated the U.S. capacity to achieve decisive ends by lightning strikes that did not involve any presence of U.S. forces in hostile territory for more than a few minutes. If the United States' enemies cannot inflict significant casualties on the United States as Washington achieves its strategic goals, this is a refinement of Roosevelt's promise of avoidance of appeasement and retention of deterrence that augurs well for a reduction of violence in the world.

The joint U.S.–Israeli air attacks are occurring at the rate of hundreds or thousands of strikes per day, against which

Iran has practically no defense and which are precisely targeted. No country can sustain this level of assault for more than a few weeks. The present campaign is expected to last up to five weeks before the complete achievement of its objectives but seems to be well ahead of the initial schedule. In all of these circumstances, it is practically impossible for the present Islamist government of Iran to survive, given the U.S. ability to isolate the country completely from any intercourse with the outside world.

All talk of a forever war or a reenactment of Iraq or Afghanistan is demonstrable rubbish. This regime will be eliminated or emasculated, and the terrorist puppet organizations on the frontiers of Israel will be cut off from all outside support. The level of violence in the Middle East will be reduced to its lowest level since before the Ottoman Empire became the "sick man of Europe" (200 years ago).

Trump has defeated terrorism and is positively altering the correlation of forces in the world in favor of democracies. Like Venezuela, Iran will shortly be supplying oil to Western Europe rather than China, which, coupled with India's withdrawal as a customer for Russian oil, will make Moscow's ability to finance its war in Ukraine very difficult. Russia has a gross domestic product smaller than Canada's and has already taken a million casualties in a war that has lasted longer than that between Stalin and Hitler.

All wars are hell, as Gen. William Sherman once said, but this action in Iran is a just conflict for the West that will almost certainly be victorious, have decisive positive consequences, and come at minimal cost.

Conrad Black has been one of Canada's most prominent financiers for 40 years and was one of the leading newspaper publishers in the world. He's the author of authoritative biographies of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Richard Nixon and, most recently, "Donald J. Trump: A President Like No Other."



What Have You Learned in 6 Hard Years?

By Jeffrey A. Tucker



The past six years have been a time of astonishing revelation about many features of public life that had been previously hidden. I’m not just speaking of the Jeffrey Epstein files, although they are part of it. We’ve all seen and experienced things over these years that (at least to me) would have been nearly inconceivable before. It’s shaken us and forced people to recalibrate their understanding of the world.

If you have changed your mind on some important matters, congratulations? That’s a sign of humility, curiosity, adaptability, and adherence to facts over bias. This is a virtue. People who report no change are either omniscient, which is doubtful, not paying attention, or just so doggedly attached to previous views that nothing can unsettle them.

I have a huge archive of my own writings over decades and I look through sometimes just to test how and to what extent my own outlook has shifted. Indeed, it has. There is value in my old books and articles, but reading them now, I detect a kind of naivete, a simplicity in theory and understanding. I don’t think that it is just maturing here. There is more going on.

Below I list some of the issues on which our times have introduced depth and complexity that defy conventional ideological categories. I suspect that you might have undertaken a similar journey yourself but likely with different starting points and different conclusions. We all process this new transparency in different ways. I can only chronicle my own, which I’ve summarized in 10 points.

Things are changing today and not because the establishment wants it that way. Things are changing because people are learning, gathering, acting, and insisting on change.

1. WE WERE INTRODUCED TO A NEW CONCEPTION OF WHAT GOVERNMENT IS IN REAL LIFE. Perhaps we once thought of government as the people we elect. That’s supposed to be how it works. As it turns out, gradually, over a century and a bit more, an unelected bureaucracy has come to take power. It runs circles around the elected representatives of the people. It has deep links throughout society. The administrative state also has the institutional knowledge and holds on for dear life from the turning of one leader to another.

The Constitution states that the president is head of the executive branch. President Donald Trump has attempted to control its 444 agencies but has been stopped by a flurry of lawsuits. As it turns out, the machinery of state is impervious to elected leaders and designed to be exactly that. The same is true of Congress, which has its own staff that migrates and lasts through every political turning. This is not democracy. This is an entrenched and unelected oligarchy. It needs to change, lest the people be disenfranchised forever.

2. WE NEWLY UNDERSTAND WHAT INDUSTRY CAPTURE MEANS. In the past, it’s not been entirely clear how agency government works with industry. Two views have prevailed: Agencies exist in an antagonistic relationship to business in ways that harm enterprise or agencies work to protect the people against the depredations of corporations. Now that we’ve had a closer look, we see a more symbiotic relationship between large and powerful corporations and the agencies that are supposed to control them. We see this in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, education, technology, and munitions. This problem is pervasive.

3. ACADEMIA, AS IT TURNS OUT, IS NOT THE BEE’S KNEES. University intellectuals have long been valorized



▲ A cattle farmer checks on hay for his cattle herd in Ashland, Va., on Feb. 12, 2026.

as the best and the brightest, the institutions guarding an independent version of truth that rises above the exigencies of the mutating public mind. But think about the major controversies of our time that academia has in general done little to nothing to resolve and much to promote: transgender issues, woke ideology, lockdowns for infectious disease, censorship, welfare corruption, the integrity of science, the problem of citizenship, and on and on.

Academia in general has given off the appearance of aloofness to it all or of merely being a participant in sketchy financial dealings. Think of it: When Trump started cutting the funding of elite universities, there was no real outcry at all. This is because academia has lost its once-high status in American life.

4. BIG MEDIA MOSTLY IS HOPELESSLY PARTISAN. There was a time when we might have believed that the watchdog media was the essential bulwark to stand between the citizens and political power, holding elected leaders to account. This old view has been proven unsustainable in light of the past decade, in which its blatant partnership has been unbearably obvious. The war on Trump that began in 2016 led inexorably to a complete takeover of the newsroom, which then diminished trust in media, which is at historic lows. What’s more, we’ve learned that the biggest media players also operate in a cooperative relationship with state priorities, much more so than we knew before.

5. BIG BUSINESS PARTNERS WITH BIG GOVERNMENT. There was a reason why, during the recent respiratory COVID-19 pandemic, that your local small businesses were closed, whereas the big-box stores were open. There is a reason why, when the opening started happening, capacity restrictions hit small coffee shops but large eat-in restaurants thrived. It’s because of their pull in Washington and statehouses. The

big guys have political pull, whereas the small guys do not. The big guys deploy the power of government to hurt the competition. Is this how it works? Maybe I knew this abstractly, but seeing it all unfold in real time was remarkable.

6. THE SCIENCE IS SKEWED AT BEST. Like you, I used to think that peer-reviewed publications in prestigious journals were likely approximating some truth. Then I watched as these same journals and publications ran articles that were obviously manipulated, false, or just completely made up to fit with a prevailing political agenda. Once we found out that these venues are funded by the very industries they cover, it started to make sense. Now most of us have come to doubt the truth of much, if not most, of what they publish. This is supposed to be the age of science and yet we cannot presume to trust what appears under the name science.

7. COURAGE IS SCARCE. I once believed that when people thought the right things—freedom matters, humans have rights, we should follow laws, censorship is wrong, bureaucrats should not rule outside their realm of competence—that they had already won most of the battle. What I did not understand entirely is that the courage to act on convictions is far more rare than convictions themselves. Indeed, without the courage to stand up for truth at some risk to reputation and financial well-being, it’s not clear that one’s convictions matter much. Not only that, such courage is exceedingly rare. Most people can be cowed by fear of the unknown. I did not know this.

8. THE LEFT AND RIGHT ARE FUZZY CONCEPTS. We all used to think that we understood what was right and what was left, as if they are fixed categories. Same with the word “libertarian”: We thought that we could predict views and actions based on those labels. I no longer believe that. I’m now allied with people schooled

on the left in ways I never imagined possible, and with others on the right whom I once seriously doubted. Nor do these words seem to mean much now that the left seems to push things that make zero sense according to their previous principles and the right has warmed up to topics that were formerly only of interest to the left. In general I’m glad for this, but I’m waiting for all of it to be settled in some ways that it is not now.

Without the courage to stand up for truth at some risk to reputation and financial well-being, it’s not clear that one’s convictions matter much.

9. FOOD MATTERS AS MUCH AS MEDICINE. I once believed that concern over chemicals in food and large-scale industrial agriculture was wildly overwrought. But after discovering the problems in the medical world and Big Tech, it seemed obvious to consider the ways in which government intervention in agriculture is also creating cartels and distortions. Put that together with genuine concerns over health and you see the problem that has been highlighted by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. This issue that I had completely dismissed 10 years ago is now front and center in my thinking, along with a passion to see the restoration of small regenerative agriculture.

10. YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. Here is what has shocked me most. I’m now connected with a large group of Americans that is deeply concerned for the future of freedom in every sector: education, medicine, agriculture, technology, and citizenship rights, including voting integrity. I’ve seen this movement blossom from being nearly nonexistent to becoming enormously powerful and influential, not only in the United States, but also all over the world. Things are changing today, and not because the establishment wants it that way. Things are changing because people are learning, gathering, acting, and insisting on change. This inspires me to no end. We need more of this in every area of life.

Jeffrey A. Tucker is the founder and president of the Brownstone Institute and the author of many thousands of articles in the scholarly and popular press, as well as 10 books in five languages, most recently “Liberty or Lockdown.” He is also the editor of “The Best of Ludwig von Mises.” He writes a daily column on economics for The Epoch Times and speaks widely on the topics of economics, technology, social philosophy, and culture.



TATJANA PETKEVICA/UNSPLASH.COM

Reality Check: Strain of the Welfare State, Housing, and Globalization

By Tamuz Itai



In my last article, I deconstructed the internal mechanics of the U.S. economy: the “hybrid” nature of the Federal Reserve, the “alchemy” of private money creation, and the five hidden roles of taxation. We saw how these domestic tools are used to maintain a fragile equilibrium. We now need to explore the ensuing internal rigidities of the American system, and then the deeper pressure that comes from a global structure that redistributed production, capital, and risk in ways that domestic systems were never designed to absorb.

The Modern Welfare State

This brings us to the most rigid part of the American system: where that money goes. Despite the debates over defense or foreign aid, in the United States and Europe alike, the majority of spending is dedicated to pensions, health care, and unemployment insurance.

It begins with a monetary system that, by its very design, tends to inflate the value of assets over wages, widening the gap between those who own and those who work. This is compounded by a globalized economy that often hollows out domestic payroll bases—in part because of predatory actors such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), who don’t play by the rules—leaving workers with less leverage even as the cost of living, anchored by those rising asset prices, continues to climb.

As demographics shift toward an aging population and modern health care costs rise, dependency ratios increase, placing a heavier burden on a shrinking pool of active earners to support the retired. In addition, many programs meant to assist weaker segments of the populace have actually reversed the incentive to work. In response, welfare commitments must grow, trying to stabilize society. Although each of these moves is a logical reaction to a specific crisis, together they forge a rigid architecture where incentives stack.

These commitments are structural, not discretionary. When the Fed engages in asset-supporting policies, it creates a “wealth effect” that helps stabilize the balance sheets that fund these social commitments. We are caught in a cycle in which the Fed must keep asset prices high to preserve financial stability, even as those high prices—particularly in housing—lock out the next generation.

The Housing Trap

Housing is where the abstract world of central banking meets the “bones” of the American family. For decades, home ownership was the bridge between wages and wealth. Today, housing has been financialized, outpacing wage growth and becoming a primary savings vehicle for the older generation at the expense of the younger.

The Fed is trapped. If it raises rates aggressively to cool housing, it risks a systemic correction that breaks bank balance sheets and municipal budgets. If it keeps rates low, it fuels the very asset inflation that destroys social legitimacy. This is the “tiger” the next Fed Chair must ride.

The ‘Great Convergence’

In the decades following the Cold War, a single civilizational project dominated the global imagination: the “Great Convergence.” The assumption was as simple as it was seductive: By integrating every nation into a rules-based economic model, we would not only create unprecedented wealth but also inevitably foster political liberalization. For years, the data seemed to bear this out. Goods became cheaper, inflation stayed low, and the supply chains of the world stretched into a seamless, optimized web.

But as we enter 2026, the cracks in this project have widened into a chasm. The domestic pressures facing the Federal Reserve—asset inflation, wage stagnation, and social insurance rigidity—did not arise in a vacuum. They are the direct result of a global alignment that is finally breaking. We are no longer living in the era of integration; we are living through the “Great Rewind.” And as the old balance fails, we are discovering that interdepen-



MADALINA KILROY/THE EPOCH TIMES

dence without resilience is a recipe for systemic collapse.

The Asymmetry of Openness

The fundamental flaw of the globalization era was the assumption of reciprocity. The rules-based order, typified by the World Trade Organization, was designed for participants who would internalize its norms. Instead, the system collided with a regime optimized for state advantage: the CCP.

China’s entry into the global market in the early 2000s acted as a massive accelerant for Western corporate profits, but it was never a symmetrical arrangement. Beijing treated integration not as an end, but as a means to acquire technology, capital, and geopolitical leverage. While the West optimized for efficiency, the CCP optimized for strategy.

The result was a profound structural mismatch. Global markets integrated at lightning speed, but our domestic institutions—built for industrial economies where production and taxation were geographically aligned—could not adapt. Capital became mobile and global, while labor remained local and vulnerable. This broke the alignment that once supported middle-class wages in developed nations. Wall Street thrived on the integration, but Main Street was left to absorb the adjustment.

The Diagnostic Disruptors

When systems this large begin to fail, the adjustment does not appear first in policy white papers; it appears in people. The rise of polarizing figures and the hardening of state-led strategies are not the causes of the breakdown; they are its symptoms.

In the United States, President Donald Trump’s significance was less ideological than it was diagnostic. He has been giving voice to a constituency that realized elite-managed globalization was no longer self-correcting (if it ever was). By naming grievances—trade deficits, industrial decline, and institutional distrust—he signaled that the old consensus was dead.

On the other side, the CCP served as the ultimate stress test. By demonstrating that market participation did not require political conversion, they forced the rest of the world to move from trust to hedging. Strategies that once seemed fringe—strategic decoupling, industrial policy, and supply chain redundancy—have now entered the mainstream of every major capital. The world is no longer optimizing for the lowest price; it is optimizing for the highest resilience.



CHENG XIN/GETTY IMAGES

▲ The Federal Reserve in Washington on Nov. 17, 2025.

The ‘rewind’ we are living through is more than an economic correction; it is a civilizational realignment.

The world is no longer optimizing for the lowest price; it is optimizing for the highest resilience.

▼ Gantry cranes and container ships at the Yantian International Container Terminals in Shenzhen, China, on April 12, 2025.

The Price of Reality

Adjustment is never painless. Systems accumulate imbalances slowly but release them with the violence of a breaking wave. The “era of cheap everything” was, in effect, a subsidy provided by global asymmetry and the hollowing out of domestic capacity. Removing that asymmetry means that the subsidy is gone.

The first friction of this rewind is economic: Rebuilding domestic production and securing supply chains is inherently inflationary. We are trading efficiency for security, and the bill is coming due at the grocery store and the gas pump. The second friction is political: As the economic model shifts, old coalitions fracture. Democracy, by its nature, absorbs this stress “out loud,” leading to the heightened volatility we see today.

But the deepest friction is psychological. Societies grow accustomed to a fragile equilibrium and mistake it for normalcy. The temptation during such transitions is to promise a “painless” path back to the past—to offer protection without cost or continuity without sacrifice. These are structural impossibilities. History, from Churchill’s Britain to the present, suggests that societies are more resilient when leaders speak honestly about the hardship of realignment. Reality does not negotiate; it simply adjusts, and it punishes illusions as harshly as errors.

The Requirement of Discernment

We have reached a fork in the road where technical knowledge—the models of the Fed or the spreadsheets of the World Trade Organization—is no longer sufficient. What is required now is a civic virtue that different traditions call by different names: prudence, virtue, or discernment.

Discernment is the refusal to mistake comfort for truth. In a global context, it means recognizing that integration without reciprocity is not peace, and dependence without leverage is not cooperation. The CCP’s example is clarifying because it revealed the flaws in our own assumptions. The lesson is not that we must isolate but that we must engage with a clear-eyed understanding of when engagement strengthens us and when it erodes us.

This applies domestically as well. We must discern when credit empowers and when it entraps, when welfare stabilizes and when it merely obscures a deeper decay. These are not questions that can be outsourced to an algorithm or a technocratic board. They are human decisions made under uncertainty, constrained by character.

Conclusion

The “rewind” we are living through is more than an economic correction; it is a civilizational realignment. We began this investigation by asking how our institutions work. We end with a question of how we, as people, navigate them when they fail. Systems will always adjust, and reality will always reassert itself. The only variable left is whether we have the clarity of judgment to see the world as it is, rather than as we wish it to be, and act accordingly.

Tamuz Itai is a journalist and columnist who lives in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Morality, the Thread We Cannot Let Go

By Kay Rubacek



Most people have never heard of Mrinank Sharma. That is part of the problem. On Feb. 9, 2026, Sharma resigned from Anthropic, one of the most influential artificial intelligence companies in the world. He had led its Safeguards Research Team, the group responsible for ensuring that Anthropic’s AI could not be used to help engineer a biological weapon. His final project was a study of how AI systems distort the way people perceive reality. It was serious, consequential work for humankind. His resignation letter was seen more than 14 million times on X. It opens with the words “The world is in peril.” And it ends with a poem and the announcement of his departure from one of the most consequential jobs in artificial intelligence in order to pursue a poetry degree. Yes, you read that right: peril and poetry.

The poem he quoted is “The Way It Is,” by the American poet William Stafford. It speaks of a thread that runs through a life—a thread that goes among things that change but that does not change itself. While you hold it, you cannot get lost. Tragedies happen. People suffer and grow old. Time unfolds, and nothing stops it. And the final line: “You don’t ever let go of the thread.”

Although he didn’t state it explicitly, I argue that that thread is morality. It is the enduring sense that some things are right and some things are wrong—not because a law says so, and not because it is profitable, but because human beings, at their best, have just always known it.

Sharma spent two years watching that thread being let go under pressure, in rooms the public is never shown.

His letter states: “Throughout my time here, I’ve repeatedly seen how hard it is to truly let our values govern our actions.

“I’ve seen this within myself, within the organization, where we constantly face pressures to set aside what matters most, and throughout broader society, too.”

He wrote that humanity is approaching a threshold at which “our wisdom must grow in equal measure to our capacity to affect the world,



▲ A humanoid robot at the Global Developer Conference in Shanghai on Feb. 21, 2025.

lest we face the consequences.” He wrote that he wanted to contribute with integrity and to devote himself to what he called “the practice of courageous speech.”

A man who built defenses against bioterrorism concluded that the most important thing he could do next was learn to speak with honesty and courage. That is a major signal about what is happening behind closed doors in AI research and development.

Laws and institutions are not enough on their own. They depend on citizens and leaders who hold themselves to something that exists before the law and above it.

Many experts have compared the development of AI to the development of the atomic bomb. The Manhattan Project was built in total secrecy. The public had no knowledge of it, no voice in how it was used, and no say in what came after. When it was over, some of the scientists who built it spent the rest of their lives in anguish. Several walked away during the project itself.

Sharma was not alone. Numerous safety researchers have walked off AI projects from multiple companies. These departures may be the only signals we, the public, have, because almost everything else about AI development is happening beyond public view. The internal debates, the safety trade-offs, the negotiations over what this technology will and will not be permitted to do—none of it is being shared with the people whose lives it will most profoundly shape. We are not part of this conversation. We are being presented with outcomes and told to adapt.

John Adams wrote that the Consti-

tution was made only for a moral and religious people and that it is wholly inadequate for any other. George Washington warned that liberty cannot survive the loss of shared moral principles. The Founders studied the collapse of republics throughout history and arrived at the same conclusion: The machinery of freedom requires a moral people to sustain it. Laws and institutions are not enough on their own. They depend on citizens and leaders who hold themselves to something that exists before the law and above it.

That is the thread of human society, and no AI system holds it. If people allow AI to replace the question of right and wrong with the measure of what is legal and permitted, the machine will carry that measure forward at a scale and speed that no previous generation has had to reckon with.

As Sharma ended his resignation letter, “You don’t ever let go of the thread.”

We are at a crossroads not unlike the one the atomic scientists faced.

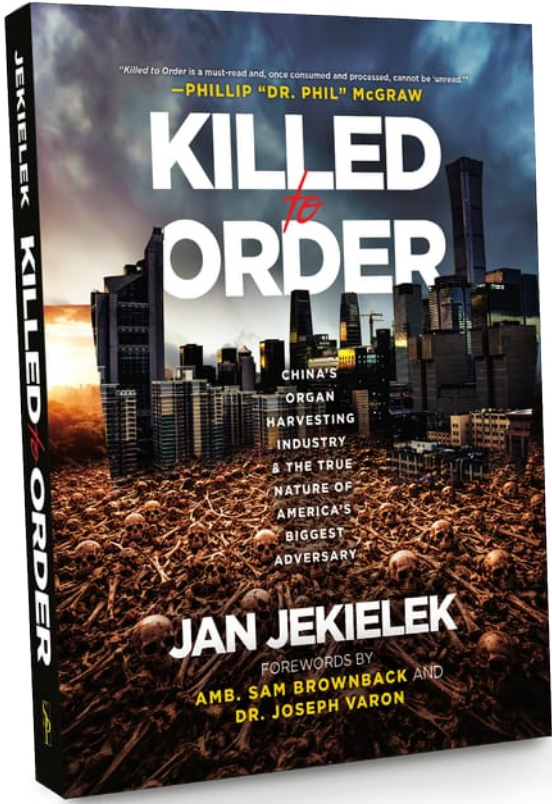
Sharma’s resignation was a signal. The wave of departures before and after it are signals. The reported tensions between AI companies and government over where moral limits should be drawn are also signals. Together, they are pointing at something the public has not yet been fully invited to consider: that the most important questions about this technology are being worked out without us, and that the thread of morality, which has always required people to hold it by choice, needs to be part of that conversation.

Kay Rubacek is an award-winning educator, filmmaker, author, and mother. She was detained in a Chinese prison in 2001 for her human rights advocacy and has since dedicated her work to exposing the systems and ideologies that diminish human life and human sovereignty. She has been a contributor to The Epoch Times since 2010.



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Rediscovering the Dignity of Work

By Ray Craig

“The purpose of life is not to be happy,” reads a quote commonly attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson. “It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.”

In the film “Reagan” (2024), an ambitious young Russian politician meets with a grizzled KGB veteran who had spent decades surveilling Ronald Reagan, from his days as an actor through his presidency. The young politician poses one crucial question: Why did the Soviet Union lose the Cold War? The answer lies not in military strategy or economic policy, but in a simple novel that shaped Reagan’s character as a child growing up in Dixon, Illinois.

During their meeting, the former Soviet agent walks to his bookshelf and pulls out an obscure book: “That Printer of Udell’s,” by Harold Bell Wright. He recounts how Reagan’s mother, Nelle Reagan, a devout Christian, gave the novel to her 11-year-old son. After reading the book, Ronald Reagan asked to be baptized—the start of a deep faith that would grow throughout his life and ultimately drive his spiritual battle against communism.

A Tale of Practical Christianity

The book’s main character, Dick Falkner, has a drunken father and a nomadic childhood, circumstances that no doubt resonated with a young Ronald Reagan amid similar hardships.

Above all, the characters of Falkner and the young business owner George Udell are excellent role models, embodying the book’s central theme of practical Christianity—having a plan and taking action to execute God’s will.

Practical Christianity goes beyond straight preaching, your church denomination, or being seen in the pews on Sundays. It’s about giving someone a chance to earn his way, as Udell demonstrates in an early scene.

Late one night at his print shop, Udell finds himself overloaded and in need of help. Off the cold street walks a desperate, disheveled Falkner. He is still searching for work after being rejected by every other place in town, including a church.

Udell immediately sits Falkner down at a desk to see what he can do. Falkner doesn’t hesitate, doesn’t quibble over how much he’s going to get paid. No, young Falkner digs in and proves himself with good work, and a partnership is born.

As Falkner establishes himself at Udell’s and improves himself and his situation, his circle of influence grows within the town and church. This progression leads to Falkner devising a social welfare plan for the poor, drawing from his experience as a vagabond.

The Test of Work

At the heart of Falkner’s welfare plan lies a simple test: the willingness to work.

When someone challenges Falkner that charity breeds laziness, he responds with the following argument: “Not if it were done according to God’s law. ... The present spasmodic, haphazard sentimental way of giving does [encourage laziness]. It takes away a man’s self-respect; it encourages him to be shiftless and idle; or it fails to reach the worthy sufferers.”

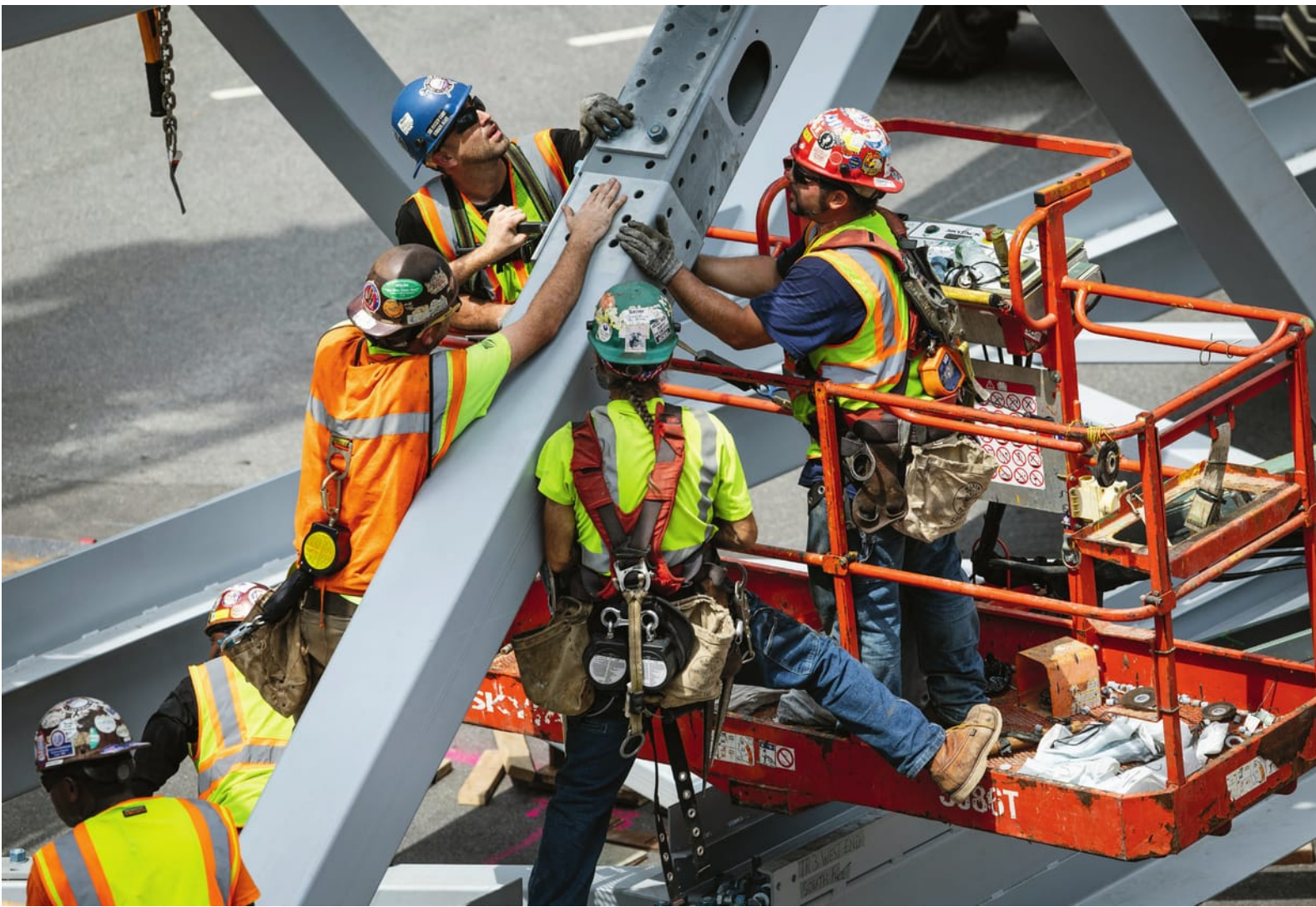
“But what is God’s law?” asked the other.

“That those who do not work should not eat,” replied Dick, ‘and that applies on the avenue as well as in the mines. ... Different localities would require different plans, but the purpose must always be the same. To make it possible for those in want to receive aid without compromising their self-respect, or making beggars of them, and to make it just as impossible for any unworthy person to get along without work.”

The novel’s theme of dignity through work reaches its pinnacle in the story of a young woman who chooses meaningful labor over social status.

Choosing the Better Life

“That Printer of Udell’s” reveals work’s deeper meaning through Amy Goodrich, a wealthy young woman pushed toward an advantageous marriage to maintain social status. When her parents forbid her from teaching underprivileged children, she responds by leaving home. After finding her way to a farm, Goodrich discovers purpose in honest labor, tending to daily chores alongside the family who took her in.



▲ Workers prepare to lift a new pedestrian bridge into place in Stamford, Conn., on Aug. 26, 2023.

When her parents demand that she return home, Goodrich is resolute in her reply: “Amy looked at her [mother] steadily. ‘You know that a woman degrades herself when she does nothing useful, and that I count my present place and work, far above my old life at home.’”

A century later, Goodrich’s stand for meaningful work feels prophetic. Today, her words would fall on deaf ears in a culture that prizes comfort over calling.

Work in the Post-COVID-19 World

Reading “That Printer of Udell’s” caused me to examine our post-COVID-19 pandemic relationship with work, particularly in white-collar industries.

Five years later, the debate over remote work versus in-office work masks a deeper crisis: a fundamental shift in people’s attitude toward their jobs.

Beyond the desire to work from home, I’ve witnessed a growing resistance to meaningful effort. Work has become purely transactional—no longer about contribution or purpose, but about minimal engagement for maximum comfort.

When we give our best to meaningful labor, we not only build stronger, but we also build stronger souls.

The new standard? Do just enough to fund the modern luxuries: smartphones, streaming services, DoorDash deliveries, and Instagram vacations.

The dignity of work has been replaced by a culture of convenience.

Their Clear Priority

At my company’s recent all-staff meeting, employees submitted 40 questions for our owner to address. Only one asked about taking on more responsibility. None focused on improving our products or serving customers better.

The remaining questions revealed a full-court press on reducing work hours.

Can we get more clarity on our remote work policy? (Note: We’re very clear about wanting people in the office; they don’t like our answer.)

What is the protocol for snow/cold/bad weather days?

Can we get summer Fridays? (Note: They want to leave work at noon every Friday from June to September.)

Can we completely close down during the last week of the year? (Note: No, we support customer websites 24/7/365.)

This mindset isn’t unique to our company. Through networking groups, we’ve learned that business owners everywhere face this same resistance to meaningful work. What began as isolated requests for flexibility has evolved into a broader cultural shift away from the very meaning of work itself.

Reclaiming Work’s Noble Purpose

The COVID-19 pandemic era ushered in more than health protocols and remote work policies. It accelerated a profound

shift in our relationship with work, eroding the very ethic Ronald Reagan championed against communism. Under the banner of workplace flexibility and personal freedom, we witness the steady decay of initiative, responsibility, and pride in meaningful contribution.

Yet hope remains in daily acts of resistance. When we choose excellence over convenience and service over comfort, we echo Falkner’s conviction that work builds character. Through mentoring young employees to value contribution above compensation, through persevering to serve our customers, we preserve what Ronald Reagan discovered in “That Printer of

Udell’s”: Meaningful work transforms a job from a paycheck into a calling.

To reclaim work’s nobility, we must see it as Udell did—as a chance to lift others while building something eternal. When we give our best to meaningful labor, we not only build stronger, but we also build stronger souls.

Ray Craig grew up on a farm in northwest Iowa before moving to Chicago, where he has spent three decades helping build and lead a family-owned technology company. A father of two, he writes about faith, family, work, and sports. His essays appear at MidwestSense.com.

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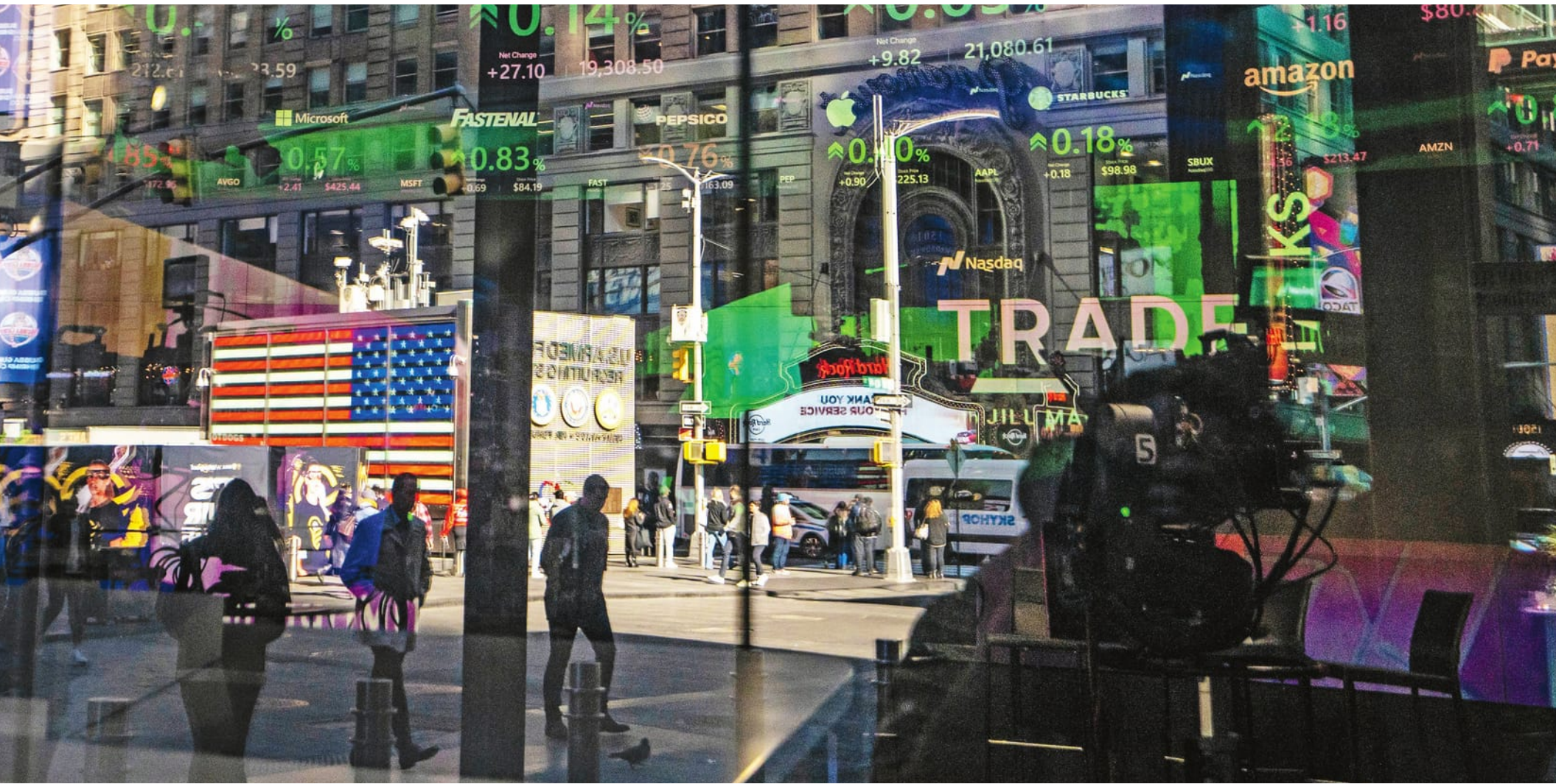


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▲ The Nasdaq MarketSite in Times Square in New York City on March 2, 2024.

You Don’t Own Your Stocks the Way You Think You Do

By Jack McPherrin



Most Americans believe that when they “buy” a stock, bond, or exchange-traded fund in a brokerage account, they become the legal owner of that security. The statement shows their name, and the shares appear as belonging to them.

But in the modern U.S. securities system, that intuition is often wrong in the way that matters most: legal title and control. What most investors hold is not a directly owned asset recorded in their name, but a contractual claim—what the law calls a “security entitlement”—against a financial intermediary.

That may sound like semantics until one asks a simple question: In a systemic financial collapse, who is first in line to retrieve those securities? In other words, the difference between owning an asset and holding a claim can determine whether investors’ assets are legally subordinated to other claims, and whether investors recover their assets at all.

The answer depends less on what your account statement says and more on how Wall Street’s plumbing and a little-known uniform state law governing securities ownership were built to perform under stress.

The Invisible Owner of Record

For most of the history of securities markets—from English common law through much of the 20th century—investors who bought shares were recognized as their legal owners, often holding certificates in their own name. Trades were slower, more cumbersome, and paper-intensive, but ownership was straightforward. If you bought shares, you were typically

the registered owner by default.

That is no longer how most securities ownership works.

The modern system is built around a centralized clearing and custody structure dominated by the Depository Trust Co. (DTC), a privately owned institution controlled by the largest U.S. banks and broker-dealers. In broad terms, major brokers and banks “deposit” investors’ securities at the DTC, which holds them in pooled form. The registered owner reflected on issuer records is typically not the end investor and often not even the brokerage firm the end investor uses. It is DTC’s nominee, Cede & Co.

Here is the practical consequence: When you “own” a stock through a brokerage account, you are generally what is called a “beneficial owner” credited on your broker’s books. The owner of record is upstream, and the securities themselves sit in a centralized system designed to reduce costs and manage institutional risk—rather than to preserve clear, direct ownership for ordinary investors.

If that sounds like a technicality, think of the difference between owning a car and leasing a car. A lease can give you many of the benefits of use, but it is not the same legal relationship to the underlying property. In the same way, a security entitlement can provide financial benefits from an asset while leaving the investor multiple steps removed from legal title and direct control.

This distinction, quietly normalized over decades, has created a fragile kind of “ownership” that many investors do not understand and that policymakers have not adequately confronted. I explored these issues in greater depth in “The Next Big Crash,” a book I coau-

thored that examines how modern financial market structures put investors at serious risk during moments of systemic financial stress.

The Legal Structure That Decides Priority

Wall Street’s indirect holding system might be defensible if it merely replaced paper certificates with electronic records while preserving the investor’s core property rights. But that is not what has happened. The deeper shift occurred in the law that governs these relationships—Article 8 of the Uniform Commercial Code—which has been amended and adopted by every state legislature in the country.

In plain English, Article 8 establishes that the securities credited to customers at a brokerage are generally not supposed to be treated as the brokerage firm’s property. That sounds comforting, until one reaches the key exception clauses in the statute, which clearly state that under certain conditions, a broker’s secured creditor gains priority over the assets of the broker’s customer.

This is not a fringe interpretation. It is explicitly stated in the law itself, which has been sharply criticized by leading securities law scholars. If a broker pledges its customers’ securities as collateral and their creditor gains legal “control,” that creditor stands ahead of the customers who bought the securities. Crucially, this applies even if brokers have acted improperly or illegally, as long as collusion with the creditor cannot be proven.

To most people, that should feel backward. If you pay for an asset, you should not lose it because your middleman used it—properly or improperly—to fund its own survival.

But under the modern regime, what many customers have is not a direct, registered ownership interest in a specific, identifiable security. Instead, they have a contractual claim defined by the intermediary system and the priority rules that put banks first during an economic crisis.

‘Customer Protection’ Is Not the Same as Ownership

Defenders of the current structure will point out that there are rules intended to protect customer assets. They are right. There are segregation requirements, reporting requirements, and oversight mechanisms. There is an entire framework that assumes that customer property can be kept separate from a failing firm’s creditors.

The problem is that rules are not self-enforcing, especially in a crisis. And history shows that when financial firms face existential pressure, the temptation to treat customer property as a lifeline can become overwhelming.

The collapse of Lehman Brothers illustrates the danger. In the years leading up to its failure, Lehman routinely violated customer segregation requirements by

pledging customer securities to JPMorgan Chase to secure its own borrowing. When Lehman collapsed in 2008, JPMorgan asserted secured claims over those assets, freezing large quantities of customer property inside the bankruptcy estate. Many customers did not receive their assets for nearly five years as secured creditors litigated priority over pledged customer assets.

Lehman was not an isolated case. In 2007, Sentinel Management Group commingled and pledged hundreds of millions of dollars in customer securities as collateral for a revolving credit line, triggering years of litigation over whether a bank’s secured claim could override investor rights. Most customers were not made whole for nearly a decade. And in 2011, MF Global filed false segregation reports and unlawfully tapped segregated customer accounts to meet margin calls, leaving tens of thousands of customers without access to funds they relied on for routine operations. Even when recoveries eventually occurred, the process took years.

These episodes differ in detail, but they share a theme: Protections that investors assume to be absolute can fail in practice. And when they do, investors can be thrown into prolonged legal uncertainty. Even a “successful” recovery can be devastating when retirement savings, liquidity, or margin collateral are frozen for months or years.

Some readers may point to the Securities Investor Protection Corp. (SIPC) as a safeguard. SIPC does provide limited insurance when a brokerage firm fails. But like the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. for banks, it was designed to manage isolated insolvencies—not systemic financial crises. Its reserves total less than \$5 billion, a minuscule number compared with the tens of trillions of dollars held at major brokerage firms. More importantly, SIPC cannot prevent customer assets from being frozen or subordinated while insolvency proceedings unfold.

The uncomfortable truth is that “customer protection” in an intermediary system is not the same as being the registered owner with clear property rights. It is a set of promises and procedures that depend on compliance, monitoring, solvency, and the willingness of institutions to follow the rules when doing so is more costly than breaking them.

None of this is an argument for widespread panic, nor a claim that every investor is doomed. It is a diagnosis of a real property rights vulnerability embedded in the architecture of modern finance.

If policymakers want markets that are resilient in the next crisis, they should start by being honest about what most investors actually “own.” Clear disclosure, access to direct ownership for those who want it, and a reexamination of legal priority rules that place intermediaries ahead of customers are not radical demands. They are basic questions of property rights, investor protection, and trust. Financial systems run on confidence, and confidence cannot rest on assumptions that quietly collapse when stress arrives.

Jack McPherrin is a senior policy analyst and research fellow at The Heartland Institute and coauthor of “The Next Big Crash.”



▲ A trader on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange in New York City on March 10, 2025.

SPECIAL SERIES: HOW THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM IS RULING OUR WORLD

The Communist Economic Trap

The Epoch Times here serializes an adaptation from the Chinese of “How the Specter of Communism Is Ruling Our World,” by the editorial team of the “Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party.”

CHAPTER
9

Continued from last week

2. Western Countries: Practicing Communism by Another Name (cont.)

c. How Socialist Economics Moves the West Toward Authoritarianism

High taxes, high welfare, and widespread state intervention are manifestations of socialism within Western economic systems. As things stand, the only true difference between the planned economies of communist countries and heavy state interventionism in the West is that rule of law and other basic aspects of the system protect human rights from being lost under total government control.

Austrian economist and philosopher Friedrich Hayek cautioned against state-controlled planning and wealth redistribution, saying that it would inevitably tamper with the market and lead to the rise of totalitarianism, regardless of whether the system was democratic or not. Hayek believed that although the socialism practiced in Europe and North America was different from state ownership and planned economies, it would result in the same outcome—people would still lose their freedom and livelihood, just in a slower and more indirect fashion. [28]

As has been discussed earlier in this book, Marx, Engels, and Lenin all saw communism as the final goal, with socialism a mandatory step on the journey. A train’s destination will not be affected by its stopping at a station along the way—in fact, it might pick up more passengers. Likewise, the specter of communism is the driving force behind a country’s move toward socialism. Once humanity forsakes tradition, whether in the economic sphere or in other areas, and accepts communist ideology, the pace of the development toward communism is irrelevant.

The destination at the end of this path is not heaven on earth, but the destruction of humanity. The specter is not concerned with whether “heaven” is realized or not—this promise is merely bait to lure people into the trap and to their eventual demise.

3. The Dystopian Socialism of the Chinese Communist Party

In 1978, after planned economics and political campaigns had reduced China to a poverty-stricken disaster, the Chinese Communist Party was compelled to introduce economic reforms to keep its hold on power. Embarking on a process of “reform and opening up,” the CCP introduced elements of a free market. This led many to imagine that the Party had become capitalist.

a. The Chinese Economy: No Relaxation of Communist Control

Out of expedience, the CCP liberalized some aspects of the Chinese economy, such as allowing private business. But the communist cadres have not loosened their grip. Although private enterprises exist, the CCP has never promised the people any fundamental right to private property. By law, resources and land remain ultimately at the Party’s disposal.

At the same time, the CCP imposes strict controls on economic matters, including large-scale national planning. The market is only a means used by the state to stimulate production; it is not truly independent, and neither are there institutions in place to support a free market.

The Chinese communist model is a monstrous combination of socialism, statism, and market economics. There is no independent rule of law or clear system of property rights. The exchange rate is not allowed to adjust itself naturally. The



Migrant workers eat lunch at the Shenzhen Quanshun Human Resources Co. Ltd. in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China, on Feb. 26, 2009.

The Chinese Communist Party was compelled to introduce economic reforms to keep its hold on power. Embarking on a process of ‘reform and opening up,’ the CCP introduced elements of a free market. This led many to imagine that the Party had become capitalist.

flow of wealth in and out of the country is controlled, and international firms operating in the country are tightly restricted. The CCP uses government subsidies and export tax rebates to boost exports with the aim of defeating competitors in a price war. This has disrupted the normal order of world trade. It is precisely for these reasons that the World Trade Organization has long refused to acknowledge China as a market economy.

Many in Western governments harbored the naive hope that economic development would bring political liberalization and democracy to China. Instead, with greater financial means, the CCP subjected its people to more brutal and sophisticated forms of repression. For example, in order to carry out the persecution of Falun Gong, the CCP greatly expanded and empowered its security forces, pouring funds into advanced surveillance systems and promoting those responsible for “successful” persecution to high-ranking positions. Inevitably, the instruments used to persecute Falun Gong were repurposed to repress other faiths and the general population. Since 2009, the CCP has spent far in excess of 500 billion yuan (US\$75 billion) annually to cover the costs of “maintaining stability,” that is, policing the Chinese population.

b. The Truth Behind China’s Economic Rise

Because of China’s rapid GDP growth over the past 40 years, many have come to believe in the superiority of socialist economics. It has made many Westerners, including elites in political and academic circles, marvel at the efficiency of the totalitarian system.

In fact, the economic model the CCP has built can hardly be replicated elsewhere. On the one hand, despite its economic rise, the socialist system has great internal instability. On the other hand, the Party’s model enshrouds an abundance of corruption created by its unscrupulous political system. China’s economic growth has been based in large part on the following factors.

First, the relaxation of the state-owned economy and central planning, and the revitalization of the private sector, gave the Chinese economy a powerful productive drive. The Chinese people, who had had their industrious potential stifled for decades, showed their desire to rise out of poverty and their drive to do business. Moreover, China’s vast population of more than 1 billion provided an almost inexhaustible pool of cheap labor.

A second factor was the massive influx of Western capital and technology into China during the reform era. Under the command economy, China’s vast expanses of underutilized land, labor, and markets were like gold for which prices were not yet determined. The combination of capital investment and undeveloped resources ignited the blaze of China’s economic growth. Had it not been for the Party’s totalitarian rule, this fire could have started decades earlier and in a much more controllable and sustainable fashion.

The scale of Western investment in China is immense. According to published figures, American annual direct investment in China reached almost \$117 billion in 2018, up from \$11 billion in 2000. [29] The total value of foreign capital entering China from 1979 to 2015 amounted to about \$1.64 trillion, according to China’s Ministry of Commerce. [30]

Notes

28. Friedrich A. Hayek, “The Road to Serfdom” (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1944).

29. M. Szmigiera, “Direct Investment Position of the United States in China from 2000 to 2018,” Statista.com, Sept. 2, 2019.

30. “Zhongguo waishang touzi baogao, 2016” 中国外商投资报告, [“Report on Foreign Investments in China, 2016”], in “Zhongguo washang zhijie touzi linian gaikuang” 中国外商直接投资历年概况 [“A General Summary of Direct Foreign Investments in China”], The Ministry of Commerce of China. [In Chinese]

See next edition for the next installment.



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What Next for Illegal Immigrants?

By Mark Hendrickson



While the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in Minneapolis has been reduced and tensions there seem to have subsided, one of the vital policy questions going forward is this: What will the Trump administration’s immigration policy be for the rest of this year and possibly beyond?

One of President Donald Trump’s clear policy triumphs in the first year of his second term has been his success at halting the uncontrolled flood of illegal immigrants pouring across our southern border. The United States has largely regained control of that border, and the obvious policy is to maintain that secure status.

Open borders and a large welfare state make for a very precarious policy mix.

The other part of the immigration problem, however, remains unsolved: What is to be done about the millions—10, 20, 30, or more million—of illegals currently residing in the United States? Rounding up and deporting all those who have entered the country illegally would seem to be numerically impossible. That being the case, are there any priorities that the federal government could set? Are there some categories of illegal immigrants that belong at the top of the list for deportation? Yes, indeed.

We need to ask a simple question: Which illegal immigrants pose more of a risk or problem to our society? Using this as the criterion, I would classify two groups of illegals as logical targets for deportation. The first group has been designated as a target from the start: those with criminal records, whether for offenses commit-

ted here in the States or back in their home countries. The second group has remained largely unnamed, although I have seen encouraging signs lately that they are coming into focus and may soon receive the attention they deserve: illegals who are collecting welfare.

Decades ago, Austrian economist and Nobel laureate F.A. Hayek warned that open borders and a large welfare state make for a very precarious policy mix. Naturally, people will resort to extraordinary means to escape poverty in their native country and immigrate to a society with generous government handouts. According to a recent report in The Washington Times, “61% of illegal immigrant households use welfare.” That is an astonishing—although not entirely surprising—number. In this day of massive government indebtedness and stories of the defrauding of federal welfare programs swirling about, those who are in our country illegally and milking the U.S. taxpayer on an ongoing basis are logical targets for deportation.

Just as Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents should work with local law enforcement officials to help locate criminals, so immigration officers should huddle with those who manage the various welfare offices to locate illegal freeloaders.

But what should our immigration officials do when they find an illegal who is not receiving welfare benefits? Here, I will make a controversial suggestion: It is my conviction, based on a recent perusal of our immigration laws, that we have let far too few people immigrate legally. Another way of putting it is that, while we admit roughly 1 million legal immigrants annually, that number is too few relative to the current needs of our labor market. That is not to say that all those millions who entered illegally should stay here—not at all. But some of them, definitely.

The United States needs immigrants for economic reasons. In sec-



▲ Mexican migrant workers harvest organic parsley in Wellington, Colo., in this file photo.

tors such as agriculture, hospitality, elder care, construction, and various forms of grunt work, we face labor shortages that the domestic workforce, even at full capacity, is unlikely to fill. The larger reason, however, is that our elaborate welfare state requires more taxpaying laborers in order to continue to fund the benefits that seniors like myself receive. This isn’t opinion; it’s mathematical reality.

One of the most serious challenges facing the world as a whole is the large number of countries facing imminent population implosions that threaten the fiscal viability of their welfare states. The United States is in better shape than most, but even here, the only way we are going to fund programs such as Social Security and Medicare on present trajectories will be by seeing our population grow. There are those currently advocating natalist policies designed to incentivize women to have more children, but even if such programs were to be wildly successful, those additional workers wouldn’t be entering the workforce for a couple of decades. In the short run, our population will only grow through immigration.

Question: Which illegal immigrants are causing more harm—those who are working and paying taxes or those who are ripping off taxpayers? That suggests a policy compromise: U.S.

immigration policy going forward should concentrate on expelling illegals who are receiving any kind of welfare payment. Meanwhile, make some sort of accommodation for illegal aliens who are working and paying taxes and can be properly vetted. Provide them with an ID card that would give them permission to continue to work in the country but would also include stipulations such as: 1) no right to apply for citizenship for 10 (15?) years; therefore, no eligibility to vote; 2) denying them eligibility for welfare payments for a similar period.

While I entertain no sanguine hopes that the two political parties will suddenly embrace bipartisan compromise, I think the essence of what I have proposed—namely, that the United States welcome those from abroad who seek an opportunity to work while excluding those looking for a free ride—would be very acceptable to earlier generations of Americans.

Mark Hendrickson is an economist who retired from the faculty of Grove City College in Pennsylvania, where he remains fellow for economic and social policy at the Institute for Faith and Freedom. He is the author of several books on topics as varied as American economic history, anonymous characters in the Bible, the wealth inequality issue, and climate change.

The Readers’ Turn

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To Be Great, We Must Be Good

In Walker Larson’s excellent piece “Crucial Lessons From Ancient Rome: The Corruption of Family and Society” (Feb. 25–March 3), he argues that the devolution of the family unit was one of the primary causes of the fall of the Roman Empire, and how our nation is heading down the same path.

He is 100 percent correct. And the contemporary decline of the traditional family in our nation I believe can be traced largely to three major historical political events in the 1960s and ’70s.

Event No. 1: Engel v. Vitale (1962) removed prayer from public schools. When God was removed from education, so was the centuries-held belief in our nation of moral absolutes and transcendent divinely revealed truth. It was replaced with a belief and value system that inculcates students in moral relativism, secular humanism, Darwinian evolution, and atheism which, ironically enough, the Seventh Circuit Court affirmed in 2005 (Kaufman v. McCaughtry) to be a “religious belief system.”

Event No. 2: President Lyndon Johnson’s 1960s socialistic Great Society programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, the Foodstamp Act, and the establishment of HUD (Housing and Urban Development) all increased family dependence on government programs. According to many sociologists such as Dr. Thomas Sowell and others, this contributed significantly to the break

up of the American family, especially among blacks, among whom the divorce rate increased from 39 percent in 1960 to 68 percent by 2008 as government welfare programs increasingly replaced the primary bread winner and head of the household, the father.

Event No. 3: Roe v. Wade (1973), in which the Supreme Court ruled that there is a constitutional right to abortion (a decision that was recently overturned in 2022 in Dobbs v. Jackson’s Women’s Health). Any nation that doesn’t protect and defend the lives of the most diminutive, defenseless and vulnerable members of the family will ultimately become a nation where violence, abuse, and ultimate divorce becomes the norm among families. Violence begets violence.

Allowing the removal of God from schools, programs that removed fathers from homes, and accepting baby-killing via abortion as being “safe, legal and Constitutional” were, indeed, three major causes for the decline and fall of the natural human family in America.

And unless America immediately reverses course, I don’t believe there is any hope for our once great nation.

America can never be “great again” unless we become good again.

Gregg Jackson
Colorado



You’re Already Feeling the Collapsing US Fertility Rate

The United States is already living inside the consequences of a collapsing fertility rate—even though most Americans do not yet recognize the cause.

For decades, the nation’s total fertility rate has remained well below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. Today, it hovers around 1.6. That number may sound abstract, but its effects are not. School districts across the Midwest and Northeast are consolidating or closing due to declining enrollment. Child care costs now exceed in-state college tuition in many states. Hospitals, trades, and military services report persistent worker shortages. These are not isolated failures—they are connected symptoms of demographic contraction.

In 2023, the United States again recorded historically low birth levels and a sharp narrowing of the gap between births and deaths, with deaths rising relative to births as births declined. That milestone quietly placed the country on the same demographic trajectory as Japan and much of Europe. The population pyramid that once supported economic growth and national strength is inverting: Fewer young workers are being asked to support more retirees, placing unsustainable pressure on Social Security, Medicare, and the tax base.

This did not happen overnight. Cultural norms steadily encouraged women to delay marriage and childbearing in favor of education, career advancement, and

personal autonomy—during a woman’s most fertile years. Uncomfortable as this reality might be for a reader, no country on the planet that prioritizes personal gratification and growth over childbearing and -raising has a sustainable fertility rate any longer. By the time a couple contemplates children, biology has already closed the window for many. No tax credit or subsidy can refund lost years of fertility.

Governments around the world have tried to buy their way out of this problem with cash bonuses, housing incentives, subsidized child care, and extended parental leave. None have succeeded in restoring replacement-level fertility. None. The lesson is blunt: This is not an economic problem; it is a cultural problem.

Americans are already paying the price—through higher taxes, labor shortages, diminished services, and growing national vulnerability. Demography moves slowly, but once momentum turns negative, reversal becomes extraordinarily difficult. The fertility collapse is not a future threat; it is a present alarm.

We are not waiting for the impact. We are living in it. And if you have children or grandchildren, they should be particularly concerned.

John Dyson
Pennsylvania



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Comics



TANK McNAMARA

by Jeff Miller and Bill Hinds

NAOMI OSAKA'S AUSTRALIAN OPEN FASHION HAS INSPIRED... RESPONSES.

ALCARAZ'S AMAZING SHOTS MAKE SENSE NOW.

THE CLOWN IS ASKED TO REFRAIN FROM HONKING DURING POINTS.



GARFIELD

BIP BIP BOOP BOOP BOOP BIP BOOP

HI, LIZ, IT'S JON. HEY, IT'S LAUNDRY DAY HERE...

...AND I DON'T HAVE MUCH TO WEAR TO THE PARTY

WELL, THE INVITATION SAYS "COME AS YOU ARE"...

SO WHATEVER'S LEFT IN YOUR CLOSET SHOULD BE FINE

GREAT! I'LL SEE YOU SOON!

THIS IS GONNA BE BAAAAA

TIE MAAAAAAN!!!

WHEW! NOT AS BAD AS I THOUGHT



PEANUTS

featuring "Good ol' Charlie Brown" by Schulz

YOU'RE KIDDING...

COME SEE FOR YOURSELF...

ARF ARF ARF

SEE? WHAT DID I TELL YOU?

WHAT A DUMB DOG! HA! HA! HA! HA!

NOT HERE... OVER THERE!

REALLY?

HOW EMBARRASSING

I WAS BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE!



BABY BLUES

BY RICK KIRKMAN & JERRY SCOTT

OKAY, TELL ME HOW THIS PARAGRAPH SOUNDS.

I THINK THAT PEOPLE MATTER MORE THAN STUFF.

OKAY...

WHEN WE HAVE LESS STUFF, THE EARTH STAYS CLEANER AND ANIMALS ARE HAPPIER.

UH-HUH.

SO, LET'S ALL BE HAPPY WITH A LITTLE LESS.

WHAT DID YOU BREAK THIS TIME?

INTERESTING STORY...



GRAND AVENUE

BY MIKE THOMPSON

GRANDMA, I CAN'T FALL ASLEEP.

I'M SORRY.

I JUST LIE IN BED TOSSEING AND TURNING. I CAN NEVER SLEEP AT NIGHT!

STRANGE, I NEVER HAVE A PROBLEM FALLING ASLEEP AT SCHOOL.

WHAT?

SORRY! I'M OFF TO THE LAND OF NOD!

TANK MCNAMARA

I SIGNED UP FOR A TAI CHI WALKING FITNESS PROGRAM ON INSTAGRAM THAT WILL TURN ME INTO A LEAN PHYSICAL MACHINE IN A MONTH.

REALLY?

IS THIS BASED ON SHEDDING THE HEAVY BURDEN OF DISBELIEF?

I THINK IT HAS TO DO WITH AN ANCIENT SECRET THAT HAS JUST NOW BEEN RELEASED.

NO REDACTIONS?

GARFIELD

WHOA...

WHAT'S WITH ODIE?

IT'S ABOUT HIS DOG FOOD

I READ THE INGREDIENTS TO HIM

PEANUTS

I WAS RUNNER-UP IN THE SPELLING BEE! HOW ABOUT THAT?

YOU WEREN'T RUNNER-UP, FRANKLIN...

YOU CAME IN SIXTEENTH...

I WAS RUNNER-UP TO THE KID WHO CAME IN FIFTEENTH!

BABY BLUES

HOW'S THE BOOK COMING?

I NEED A CHARACTER ARC FOR THE YOUNG BOY.

DOES HE GO FROM BAD TO GOOD?

FROM SLN TO CONFIDENT?

FROM SCUMMY TO CLEAN?

NAW, IT NEEDS TO BE BELIEVABLE.

RED AND ROVER

SORRY, BOY. MOM SAYS I FEED YOU WAY TOO MUCH JUNK FOOD.

OKAY, SAY YOU'RE SHIPWRECKED ON A DESERT ISLAND WHEN ONE DAY A CRATE OF POTATO CHIPS WASHES ASHORE.

DO YOU THINK YOUR MOM WOULD CALL THE UNEXPECTED GIFT FROM THE SEA JUNK FOOD?

SHE'D CALL IT A MIRACLE OF SODIUM, CALORIES, CARBOHYDRATES, AND FAT TO KEEP HER LITTLE BOY ALIVE UNTIL BEING RESCUED!

NO, SHE WOULD NOT!

HERE, HAVE SOME.

BIG NATE

OKAY, WINK, LET'S START OUR "PORTRAIT OF A HERO" INTERVIEW.

A LOT OF PEOPLE MIGHT NOT THINK OF A WEATHER GUY AS A HERO, BUT I DO!

I MEAN, YOU'RE THE ONE WHO WARNS PEOPLE ABOUT BIG STORMS AND NATURAL DISASTERS! PEOPLE COUNT ON YOU!

...AND SPEAKING OF DISASTERS, WINK, LAST NIGHT'S FORECAST WAS A TOTAL TRAIN WRECK.

GRAND AVENUE

I ALWAYS FOLLOW A NIGHTTIME ROUTINE. I SHUT OFF THE LIGHTS, LOCK THE DOORS AND GO UPSTAIRS TO BED.

WHERE I TRY TO REMEMBER IF I SHUT OFF THE LIGHTS AND LOCKED THE DOORS.

NIGHTTIME ROUTINE, MEET SENIOR MIND.

DRABBLE

WALLY, A PACKAGE WAS LEFT ON OUR FRONT PORCH. NOW IT'S GONE. IT MAY HAVE BEEN STOLEN!

DON'T WORRY. I'LL FOLLOW THE SCENT.

IT MIGHT NOT HAVE A SCENT BECAUSE IT WASN'T FOOD.

OH, WELL THEN WHO CARES?

MUTT & JEFF



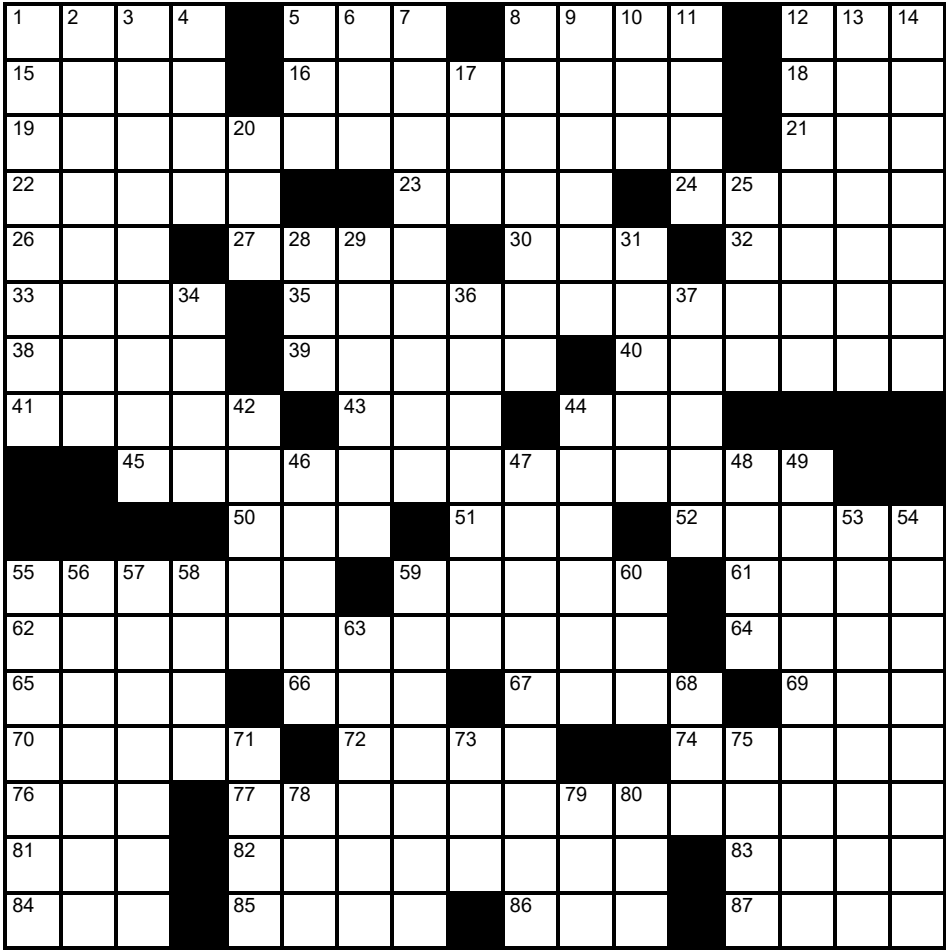
FRANK AND ERNEST

SELF-IMPROVEMENT BOOKS

DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING ON DRAGGING EVERYBODY ELSE DOWN TO MY LEVEL?

CROSSWORD

CONSTRUCTED BY TOM HOUSTON
EPOCH TIMES STAFF



- Across**
- 1. Defrost
 - 5. Order's partner
 - 8. Canary's "nose"
 - 12. "The One I Love" group
 - 15. Armenian river
 - 16. Couldn't stand
 - 18. Duct opening?
 - 19. Bermuda Triangle event
 - 21. Parisian possessive
 - 22. Little Harriet
 - 23. Fem. title
 - 24. Brings up
 - 26. Form 1040 org.
 - 27. Base of a crocus stem
 - 30. Last Greek consonant
 - 32. Veep's Marjorie Pal-miotti, DuVall
 - 33. Abbr. after many a general's name
 - 35. Mayor's bestowal
 - 38. Alpine river
 - 39. Crimson Tide coach Nick
 - 40. Permissions to leave
 - dioceses
 - 41. Muddle
 - 43. Dip bait lightly
 - 44. Fannie ____
 - 45. Award presentation site
 - 50. Rocky prominence
 - 51. Computer in "2001"
 - 52. Spanx founder Blakely and others
 - 55. Disease associated with gluten intolerance
 - 59. "'Tis a pity"
 - 61. Bolt holder
 - 62. "_____, in a land far, far away..."
 - 64. Jon of "Chicago P.D."
 - 65. Prefix with angular
 - 66. Phrase of commitment
 - 67. Brightly colored
 - 69. Actor Alastair (Scrooge)
 - 70. Abyssinian outcry
 - 72. Prefix for an element used in antiseptics
 - 74. "Gimme five!"

- 76. Archipelago unit: Abbr.
 - 77. Solar panel science
 - 81. Fortune
 - 82. "Game of Thrones" language in which "khaleesi" means "queen"
 - 83. Shade of blue
 - 84. Ltr. holder
 - 85. Grandmothers, in Germany
 - 86. Bando of baseball
 - 87. Just in case
- Down**
- 1. Amber wines
 - 2. African on the Red Sea
 - 3. Breaking point
 - 4. Celebrity chef Ming ____
 - 5. Once around the track
 - 6. Five-spot
 - 7. Guitar accessory that adds vibrato
 - 8. Climber's boot attach-ment
 - 9. English poet Dowson

CHESS CHALLENGE

BY MICHAEL GIBBS

Karpov – Liberzon (1977), White to move, Karpov's rook is much more active and Black's King in the middle of the board is a disaster! This game also featured a rarity, one of Karpov's mating tricks via Rc7+.



WORK SPACE

4NUMBERS

CONSTRUCTED BY C. CHANG
AT 4NUMS.COM

Use the four numbers in the corners, and the operators (+, −, x, and /) to **build an equation** to get the solution in the middle. There may be more than one "unique" solution but, there may also be "equivalent" solutions. For example: 6 + (7 x 3) +1= 28 and 1+ (7 x 3) +6 =28

13

36

95

9

27

+

−

×

/

Hard 1 - 1 Solution

3

9

71

3

8

+

−

×

/

Easy 1 - 1 Solution

DAILY BRIDGE CLUB

COUNTERINTUITIVE PLAY

BY FRANK STEWART, TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY
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"Do you put any stock in feminine intuition?" a club player asked me.

"It may have some basis in fact," I replied cautiously.

"Well, my wife's is so highly developed that she can tell I'm wrong before I even open my mouth."

My friend and his wife were playing against another couple, and he was declarer at four spades. West led the ten of clubs: six, queen, ace.

"I led a trump next," declarer said, "and when West followed with the nine, I played the ten from dummy. East produced the queen and led the jack of hearts, and I lost three hearts and went down two."

PERCENTAGE

"I was about to insist that I had taken the per-centage play in the trump suit, but my wife said "You're wrong" before I could speak up"

Declarer's play would gain if West had all three missing trumps, but there was an overriding consideration: Declarer didn't want East to get in since a heart shift through the king might be fatal. South's best chance is to play dummy's king on the first trump.

DAILY QUESTION

You hold: ♠ K J 10 5♥ 7 6 4♦ A K Q 10 3♣ 6. Neither side vulnerable. The dealer, at your right, opens one heart. What do you say?

ANSWER: Most players would act. If your partnership uses "equal-level conversion," double. Then if partner responds two clubs, you bid two diamonds without promising great strength. With no such understanding, overcall two diamonds. If the next player raises to two hearts, and two passes follow, you can double.

North dealer
N-S vulnerable

NORTH

♠ K J 10 5

♥ 7 6 4

♦ A K Q 10 3

♣ 6

WEST

♠ A 9

♥ A Q 8 2

♦ 8 6

♣ 10 9 8 4 3

EAST

♠ Q

♥ J 10 9

♦ 9 7 5 4

♣ K Q 7 5 2

SOUTH

♠ 8 7 6 4 3 2

♥ K 5 3

♦ J 2

♣ A J

North

1 ♦

2 ♠

4 ♠

East

Pass

Pass

All Pass

South

1 ♠

3 ♠

West

Pass

Pass

Opening lead – ♠ 10

WORDSEARCH

CONSTRUCTED BY TOM HOUSTON
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

HELP WITH TODAY'S CROSSWORD PUZZLE?

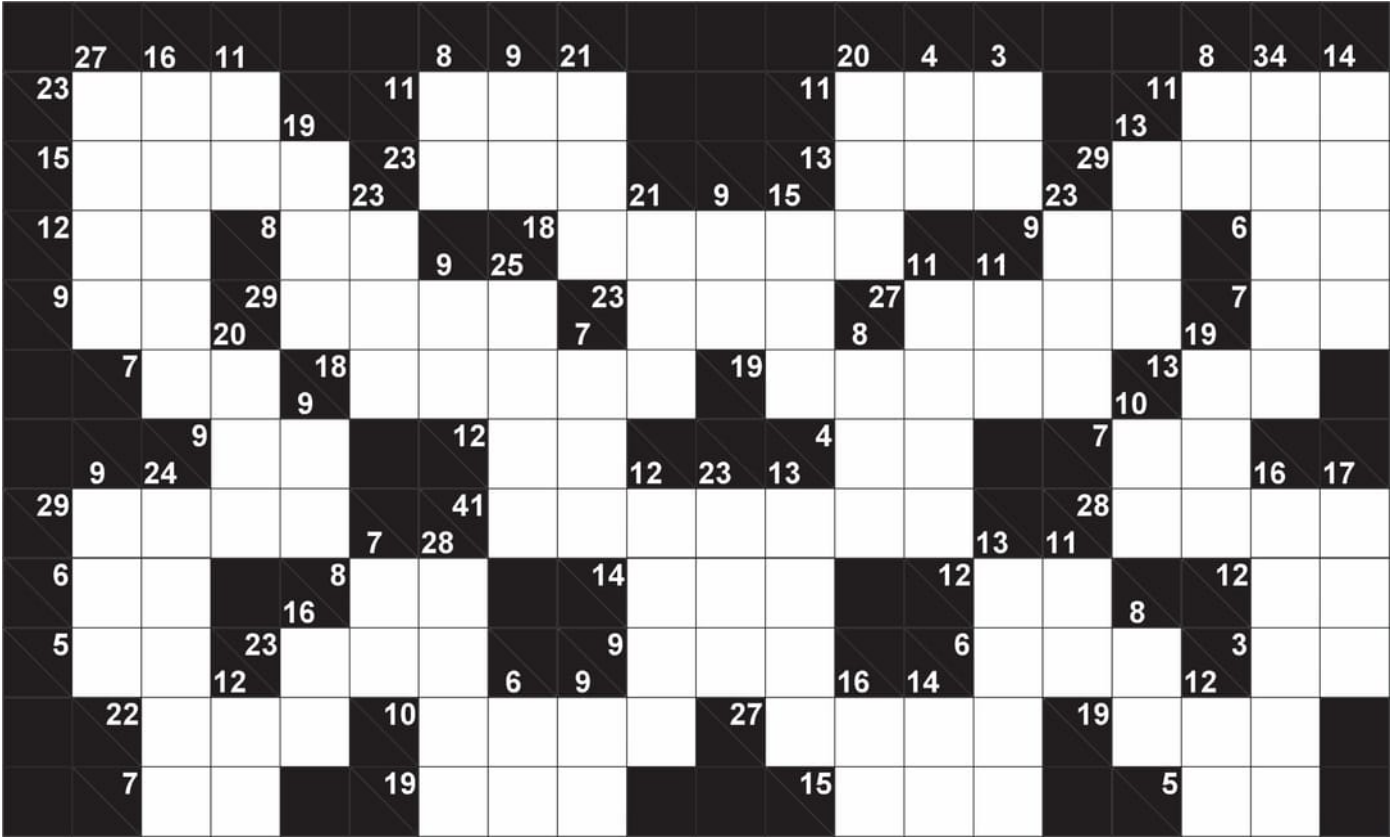
V E M S R O S A L I A C L C E O E
X R A U D I O C D S E X E C S I T
P N D K P L O C A L T V N L W H T
H E E E C M L M G L S A E Z I E I
O S I Y A R E A D E R L M R K A E
T T R T R T A X S A C O I P E R C
O M A O M S A M E T A N A F S T V
V I S T I A N P P O S G O E O E T
O L X H L B P A S O A T U X S D T
L A Y E E A V U F H N I R E A O E
T G N C S N V H N U O M E A D T L
A E R I T R E A N T V E A T W H E
I G D T S I D I O T A A R S I R I
C M X Y M I S S A Y S G S A R A S
S A B H O R R E D S N O C T I K O
U P T O P W H A M M Y B A R I N
E W I N N E R S C I R C L E U E U

- | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|------------|
| A LONG TIME | ELEISON | LOCAL TV | SABAN |
| AGO | ERITREAN | MADEIRAS | SARA'S |
| ABHORRED | ERNEST | MIAOU | SNAFU |
| AUDIO CDS | ETTIE | MILAGE | SO SAD |
| CAR-MILE | EVERETT | MISSAYS | STAMP SET |
| CASANOVAS | EXEATS | NOCTI- | TAP SHOE |
| CELIAC | EXECS | PHOTOVOLTA- | UNTAG |
| CRAMPON | I HEAR | ICS | UP TOP |
| DISAPPEAR- | IDIOTA | READER | WHAMMY BAR |
| ANCE | KEY TO THE CITY | REARS | WINNER'S |
| DOTHRAKI | LAST STRAW | ROSALIA | CIRCLE |

SUPER KAKURO

CONSTRUCTED
BY EPOCH TIMES STAFF

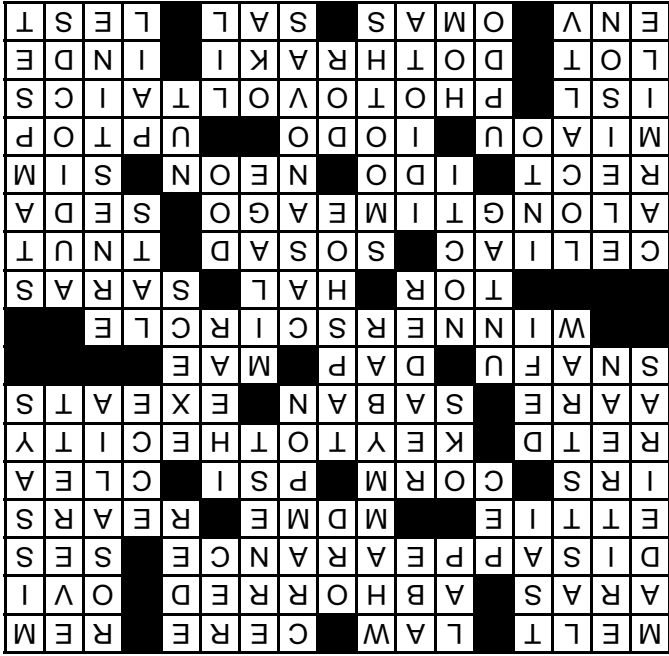
Kakuro puzzles are like crosswords that use numbers instead of words. The goal is to fill the blank squares associated with a clue (called a "run") with the numbers 1-9 so that the numbers add up to the corresponding clues. Like Sudoku, digits in a run cannot repeat. When the grid is filled, the puzzle is complete.



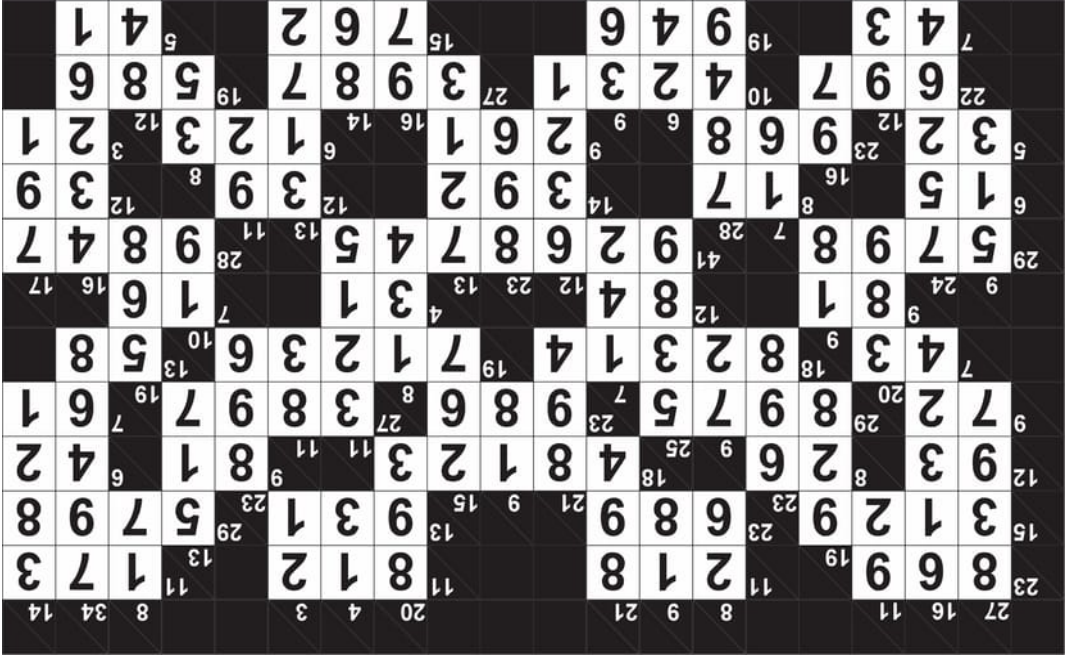
WORK SPACE

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUPER KAKURO



4NUMBERS

36 × 27 / 9 - 13
Hard 1
9 × 8 - 3 / 3
Easy 1

CHESS CHALLENGE

- 1. Kc2 Kc4
- 2. Rc7+ Kd5
- 3. Rc5+ Ke6
- 4. Nd4+ Kf7
- 5. Rxb5 Be3
- 6. Rb7+ Kg8
- 7. Nf5 Rd2+
- 8. Kb3

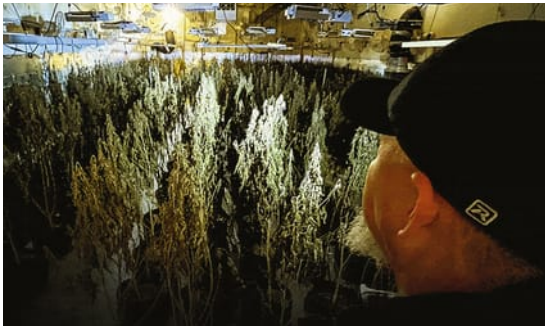


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TheEpochTimes.com

THE EPOCH TIMES

Your Brain Will Thank You

Reading newspapers doesn't just inform you—it supports your brain biology

Research shows that endless scrolling and shallow headlines actually harm the brain's attention system.

Neurological studies confirm that **daily reading of meaningful content** can sharpen memory and even delay cognitive decline by years. Deep, high-quality reading has been shown to improve blood flow in the brain, building focus and empathy. In other words, **what you feed your brain** shapes how it performs.

Your mind doesn't need more noise—it needs nourishment. And that's what we're here to provide.

THE EPOCH TIMES
TRUTH. TRADITION. HOPE.



Gradual exposure retrains your brain to stay calm under stress. **B11**

THC’s buildup may quietly alter your body’s immune balance. **B2**

Mind & Body

THE EPOCH TIMES

B1 MARCH 4–10, 2026



Your 24-hour body rhythm shapes immune strength and resilience. **B5**



LORDHENRIVOTON/GETTY IMAGES

MIND DRIVES THE MASS

Researchers have discovered that rehearsing an activity mentally activates many of the same brain networks as the actual movement.

MIND OVER MUSCLE

Your Mind Can Make Muscles Stronger, Here’s How

With certain mental techniques, you can boost performance by up to 65 percent

By Kimberly Drake

Arnold Schwarzenegger used to visualize his biceps growing “as big as mountains” before heavy lifting sessions. It wasn’t just for show. The bodybuilding legend was tapping into a now scientifically backed phenomenon known as the “mind–muscle connection.”

From thinking about movement

to “psyching up” before a workout, research has revealed that muscle strength and performance start in the brain, and that can play a powerful role in unlocking your hidden strength, if you know how to tap into it.

The Mind Drives Initial Gains in the Gym

Studies have found that when a person begins a consistent resistance training

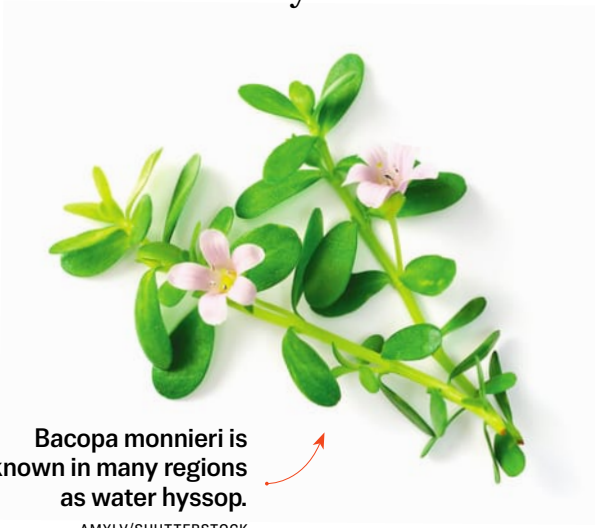
routine, they usually see fast improvements in muscle growth and strength. These early gains come mostly from the nervous system, or the mind–muscle connection, rather than the muscles themselves.

For example, when you lift weights, your initial jump in strength isn’t usually from bigger muscles but from your brain “plugging in”—what scientists call

Continued on B8

The 3,000-Year-Old Herb Sharpening Modern Minds

Used in Ayurveda for millennia, Bacopa is now being studied for brain health



Bacopa monnieri is known in many regions as water hyssop.

AMYLV/SHUTTERSTOCK

By Emma Suttie

Bacopa monnieri in its natural form doesn’t look especially impressive—it is a creeping succulent with small white flowers that thrives in swamps and bogs. However, this unassuming plant has been India’s go-to brain tonic for more than 3,000 years, and modern research is beginning to understand why.

Cognition and Memory

Known in Ayurvedic medicine as a

natural nootropic—a substance that enhances cognitive function—Bacopa is traditionally used to improve memory, sharpen focus, and protect the aging brain.

A 2024 study published in the Journal of Psychiatry and Cognitive Behaviour examined the effects of Bacopa on cognitive function and memory in 80 healthy adults. Participants received either 300 milligrams (mg) of Bacopa (containing 90 mg of bacosides, the

Continued on B8

CANNABIS

THC Builds Up in the Body, Influencing Inflammation and Immunity

Unlike alcohol, THC lingers in the body long after use

By Sarah Campise Hallier

Unlike alcohol or caffeine, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the primary psychoactive compound found in cannabis, doesn't clear from the bloodstream in a few hours; it accumulates in fat and organs, where it can continue influencing inflammation and immunity long after the high fades.

With today's high-potency products and increasingly frequent recreational use, researchers are discovering that the body's relationship with cannabis has fundamentally changed—and the long-term effects of accumulation are only beginning to come into focus.

A Different Kind of Substance

THC behaves unlike most substances the body encounters. Many drugs are processed and eliminated within hours, but THC takes a different path. After inhalation or ingestion, THC enters the bloodstream quickly and is distributed to the organs.

"Regular cannabis use leads to accumulation of lipophilic substances in fat stores and highly vascularized organs such as the brain and liver," Dr. Ella Fedonenko, an internal medicine physician, told The Epoch Times. "These substances are released back into the bloodstream very slowly, even when standard screening tests are negative."

In other words, standard drug tests measure THC metabolites in blood or urine, not what remains stored in tissues. A negative test doesn't mean that the substance—or its effects—are gone.

Regular cannabis use may influence more than mood or sleep. It can also affect how the skin protects and repairs itself.

A widely cited review by Marilyn Huestis, who has a doctorate in toxicology and is a former chief of chemistry and drug metabolism at the National Institute on Drug Abuse, found that THC spreads quickly into tissues throughout the body rather than staying in the bloodstream, where it can be detected and measured.

Why Modern Use Is Different

Humans have used cannabis for thousands of years. Historical records from China, India, and the Middle East describe its use for pain, sleep, digestion, and rituals. For much of that history, cannabis was taken in relatively mild forms, often as teas or resins from low-potency flowers that weren't bred for high THC content.

Even in the latter half of the 20th century, most cannabis products contained lower levels of THC than those commonly available today.

Selective breeding has dramatically increased THC concentration. Modern oils, vape cartridges, edibles, and tinctures often deliver far more THC than earlier forms of cannabis—sometimes 10 to 20 times the potency of products from the 1970s and '80s.

At the same time, legalization has shifted cannabis from a substance that is used occasionally to a routine wellness or lifestyle product for some users. Daily use is no longer uncommon, particularly among adults using it for sleep, anxiety, or chronic pain.

As a result, many people's bodies are no longer responding to occasional, low-dose exposure. They are adapting to repeated, high-potency contact with a substance that doesn't leave the body quickly or easily. The gradual change in dose and frequency requires the body to process cannabis in a way that has been rare historically.

The Immune System Is Paying Attention

The immune system works throughout the entire body. Immune cells are present in fat tissue, line blood vessels, and interact with nearly every organ—including the same tissues where THC accumulates.

Compounds in cannabis can influence how immune cells manage inflammation.

With short-term or occasional use, cannabis can have a calming effect on the immune system, which is why its compounds have been studied for pain and related conditions. Inflammation is meant to turn on, do its job, and then turn off.

However, as a result of regular exposure to stored THC, that process may not work as smoothly. When something repeatedly interferes with that process, the immune system can remain partially activated rather than fully resolving.

A study published in Psychological Medicine found that young adults who used cannabis daily had higher levels of suPAR, a marker linked to chronic, low-grade inflammation. Unlike other markers that spike during illness, suPAR reflects ongoing immune activity.

High suPAR levels mean that your immune system is staying on instead of resting between issues. Although it isn't an immediate emergency, long-term activation of the immune system increases your risk for heart disease and metabolic problems.

Taking a break from cannabis use doesn't result in an immediate reset. Research suggests that lingering cannabinoids can continue to affect sleep, mood, and immunity for weeks, and sometimes even months, after one stops using cannabis.

Effects at the Tissue Level

Regular cannabis use may influence more than mood or sleep. It can also affect how the skin protects and repairs itself.

"I have observed changes in skin barrier function and increased vascular permeability in patients who use cannabis regularly," Fedonenko said.

When the skin's barrier is weakened, it can become more reactive, more inflamed, and slower to bounce back after irritation or injury.

Studies also suggest that cannabis smoke and vapor can create oxidative stress in the lung cells, a type of cellular wear that can weaken normal protective barriers and make it harder for the tissue to repair itself.

"This level of oxidative stress may not cause immediate symptoms," Fedonenko said. "But over time, it can weaken tissue integrity and slow repair."

Not All Cannabis Products Act the Same

Cannabis is made up of more than 500 chemical compounds, and they do not all affect the body in the same way. The two most well-known are THC and cannabidiol (CBD).

THC is responsible for the psychoactive high and has a stronger effect on the brain and nervous system. With frequent use, it can sometimes push the immune system toward ongoing low-grade activation rather than calming it.

CBD works differently. It does not produce a high and is more often linked with steadier, balancing effects on the body. CBD may help balance some of THC's inflammatory effects.

Therefore, what a cannabis product contains matters—two products may look similar on the surface, but different THC-to-CBD ratios can lead the body in very different directions over time.

The Importance of Clean Products

Beyond THC content, product quality plays a critical role in health outcomes.

Real risks can emerge not from cannabis itself but from what can come with it, according to Dr. Dave Rabin, a physician and neuroscientist who studies stress and trauma.

"I think of medical cannabis not as a recreational indulgence but as medicine—and like any medicine, its safety profile is paramount," he told The Epoch Times. "Ensuring cannabis products are free of mold, toxins, pesticides, heavy metals, and harmful solvents isn't optional; it's a clinical imperative."

Rabin pointed to growing efforts within the medical community to bring cannabis closer to pharmaceutical standards.



TAYLER DERDEN/SHUTTERSTOCK

As cannabinoids linger in the brain and organs, they can affect sleep, mood, and immunity for weeks or months after use.

10x TO 20x

Modern oils, vape cartridges, edibles, and tinctures often deliver far more THC than earlier forms of cannabis—sometimes 10 to 20 times the potency of products from the 1970s and '80s.

The Board of Medicine's Clinical Cannabis Initiative has begun to advocate evidence-based guidelines, training, and certification standards to reduce harm and protect patients.

Rabin said that mold, residual pesticides, solvents, and heavy metals can contribute to neurological, hormonal, and systemic stress over time—effects that compound the inflammatory concerns associated with THC.

"Patients deserve medicines we can all trust," Rabin said, emphasizing the importance of organic cultivation, full-panel testing, and strict safety standards.

What Users and Doctors Can Do

For people using cannabis regularly, Fedonenko recommends monitoring inflammatory markers as part of routine health care.

"I monitor markers such as C-reactive protein and certain interleukins in chronic users," she said.

C-reactive protein is a general marker of inflammation in the body, and interleukins are signaling molecules that help regulate immune responses.

"Checking these every six months can help identify early signs of a pro-inflammatory pattern," Fedonenko said.

She also cautions against stopping suddenly after prolonged, heavy use. Abrupt cessation can disrupt stress hormone levels and immune function, making the transition more difficult for the body. Gradually reducing use, she said, is often easier to tolerate and may allow the body to recalibrate more smoothly.

The clinical approach, she said, should be one of monitoring and adjustment rather than all-or-nothing thinking.

Shifting Understanding

THC lingers and accumulates, and its effects depend on how much is used, how often it is used, and what kind of product is involved.

For occasional users, these factors may not matter much.

However, with daily use, the effects can add up over time, influencing how the body manages stress, sleep, and immune activity.

The question is no longer whether THC lingers. It's what accumulation means for long-term health, and how users and doctors should respond.

Sarah Campise Hallier, M.A. in administrative leadership, is a staff writer for A Voice for Choice Advocacy and associate editor at Appetito Magazine. Raised on organic vegetables from her mother's backyard garden, she brings a lifelong interest in clean living to stories on nutrition, environment, and lifestyle.



This shift is rarely a rejection of conventional medicine.

Many people find critical support and insight from therapeutic approaches not offered by their regular doctors.

The Smart Patient's Playbook

PART 11 1 IN 3 USE ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS—HOW TO CHOOSE

When conventional medicine falls short, holistic and integrative options offer support

By Sheramy Tsai

Across the country, patients are building alternative treatments into their own treatment plans. In 2022, 36.7 percent of adults reported using at least one complementary approach in the previous year, according to a JAMA analysis of National Health Interview Survey data—nearly double the percentage two decades earlier. Alternative forms of care include everything from guided imagery to traditional Chinese medicine.

This shift is rarely a rejection of conventional medicine. Most people who use complementary care continue seeing their regular doctors. More often, it is a response to how the medical system feels: the six-month wait, the 15-minute visit, the symptom that returns.

"The pull is often relational before it is clinical," Dr. David Rakel, chair of the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, told *The Epoch Times*.

Patient surveys show that people want to be recognized as unique human beings with unique stories, and they want to be heard, he said.

In a system built for volume and acute crises, the time required to be heard can be hard to find.

Elsewhere, the pace slows. An acupuncturist asks about stress. A naturopath asks about sleep and diet. There is time for the stories to run long. For some patients, the practitioner's listening itself feels therapeutic.

As the search expands, so do the choices. In a marketplace crowded with possibilities—some evidence-based, some speculative, some purely commercial—the harder question is, what's worth trying?

What Progress Looks Like

By the time one patient reached Dr. Victoria Maizes, he had done what his doctors had asked of him.

A viral illness had triggered Guillain-Barré syndrome, an autoimmune attack on his nerves. He received standard treatment. He did not recover. In his early 60s, he spent 23 hours a day in bed and used a wheelchair to move through his house. His pain was constant. He told her he had considered ending his life.

Maizes, the founding executive director of the Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona, did not replace his care. She took a detailed history and asked a different question: What might be blocking recovery? She offered several suggestions.

The man agreed to try an elimination

diet. Within weeks, he identified unexpected triggers—black pepper among them—that worsened his symptoms. His pain eased. He began sleeping again. When he returned, he walked with a cane and spent most of the day upright.

Another patient, a woman in her early 40s with breast cancer and diabetes, could not tolerate chemotherapy. Severe nausea repeatedly sent her to the hospital, and her oncologist feared she would have to stop.

With acupuncture twice a week and clinical hypnosis, she completed the full course. The integrative therapies did not treat the cancer itself, according to Maizes.

"They made it possible for her to stay in treatment," she said.

For many integrative physicians, success is measured less by cure than by function.

Dr. Noredia Alile, an integrative pediatrician and founder of My Native Doctor, sees patients who arrive “tired, dismissed, and living in trial-and-error mode.” They have a diagnosis but no plan. Others have been told their labs are normal while their lives are not.

Improvement, she said, means “more good days, fewer crashes.”

A child stuck in a cycle of steroid creams experienced a calming of eczema within weeks and began sleeping through the night. A patient once "on the couch by noon" returned to hiking. Someone who avoided travel boarded a plane without mapping every restroom. "That's the shift," Alile said. "From hopeless to measurable progress."

For many chronic conditions, meaningful improvement is possible, Maizes said, but it requires a different approach—and real work.

Many alternative approaches ask more of patients: dietary changes, sleep adjustments, stress regulation, or daily follow-through.

Some alternative approaches, like cupping, have been used as traditional medicine for centuries.

Many alternative approaches ask more of patients: dietary changes, sleep adjustments, stress regulation, or daily follow-through. Integrative care, she said, depends on participation: "Some people want the pill. Others are ready to change."

What Holds Up

What does the evidence say?

Some complementary therapies withstand scrutiny, particularly for pain. A systematic review and meta-analysis found that acupuncture could reduce migraine frequency compared with sham treatment or usual care, and benefits persisted after treatment. For lower back pain, chiropractic spinal manipulation has been linked to lower odds of receiving an opioid prescription the following year.

Mindfulness programs improve daily function for people living with persistent pain, depression, or anxiety. Nutrition counseling can uncover dietary patterns or nutrient gaps that routine labs might miss.

Evidence thins for more complex conditions—hormonal disorders, post-viral syndromes, autoimmune complaints—for which improvement isn't a clean cure-or-no-cure outcome.

That is where Brad Rachman, a functional medicine specialist and the medical director of the Rachman Clinic, does much of his work.

He often recommends targeted dietary changes and mind-body practices for patients with hormonal symptoms or neurologic complaints. Practices such as tai chi and meditation, he added, may help quiet the body's stress response. Patients sleep better and feel steadier.

"These shifts don't always register dramatically in clinical trials," he said. "But patients feel the difference."

For many, improvement is gradual: fewer flares, longer stretches of steady energy, a return to work or exercise. These are measurable changes, even if lab values don't flip from abnormal to normal.

Recovery is layered, Maizes said.

"Once someone experiences improvement, it changes what they believe is possible," she said.

Function improves first. Hope follows. Emerging research, she noted, suggests that hope itself may influence immune function—a reminder that recovery is not purely mechanical.

Where Trials Fall Short

The gold standard of modern medicine is the randomized controlled trial: One group gets the treatment, another gets a placebo, and researchers compare outcomes.



Many traditional systems were built differently.

Acupuncture, ayurveda, herbal medicine, and many mind-body practices were developed centuries before clinical trials existed. They grew from repeated observation and from philosophies that treat the body as interconnected rather than a set of isolated diagnoses.

Their goals can differ as well. Instead of aiming to normalize a lab value, they may aim for fewer flares, steadier sleep, or enough stamina to return to work.

“Some things are difficult to study with a classic placebo design,” Maizes said. “How do you create a sham for breath work? People know whether they’re breathing differently.”

That doesn’t place such therapies beyond scrutiny. It does mean they don’t always fit neatly into a double-blind model.

Alile describes evidence as having “multiple legs”: published research when it exists, biological plausibility, safety, and the patient’s experience over time.

If crashes become less frequent or if someone who avoided travel boards a plane again—those changes matter, even if biomarkers don’t shift.

The research landscape is uneven. Drug trials are funded because medications can be patented and sold. No one owns tai chi or journaling. Some approaches remain lightly studied for financial reasons, not necessarily because they fail.

Limited research, however, is not proof of benefit. Nor is an anecdote proof of truth.

“It requires discernment,” Maizes said. Warning signs include overpromising, testimonials in place of data, and claims of zero risk. Responsible care, she said, acknowledges limits and measures outcomes.

Truth, safety, and transparency, Alile said, are the dividing lines.

None of the physicians interviewed argued for abandoning conventional care. They described integrative medicine not as an alternative to science but as an expansion of it.

How to Decide

When alternatives help, it is often because patients are deliberate. They make one change at a time. They decide what to track—migraine days, sleep, stamina—and wait long enough to see a pattern. They resist stacking therapies before judging the first.

Rakel advises starting with low-risk, affordable options supported by credible evidence. He uses a four-part screen he calls ECHO, which stands for “efficacy, cost, harm, opinion.”

Maizes advises patients to look for formal credentials. Some physicians are board-certified through the American Board of Integrative Medicine or have completed accredited fellowships. Practitioners affiliated with academic medical centers are typically subject to institutional oversight. Credentials don’t guarantee quality, but they signal formal training and accountability.

Ideally, those choices are discussed with a primary care doctor who can interpret evidence and flag drug interactions. However, collaboration isn’t always easy.

Rachman calls such conversations “tricky territory.” Some physicians are open; others are skeptical.

“Defensiveness can say more about the fragility of the practitioner’s ego than the viability of the proposed modality,” he said.

“This is your body. You get to make choices that establish sovereignty and agency over the trajectory of your health.”

Still, choice works best with guardrails. Sometimes what’s needed isn’t one more therapy. It’s guidance to weigh what’s helping and what isn’t.

Knowing When to Stop

Sometimes the harder decision is to stop.

Care can accumulate quietly: another supplement, another session described as the missing piece. Each step feels reasonable on its own. After three appointments, a fourth feels hard to cancel. After \$200 on supplements, quitting feels wasteful. Hope nudges the plan forward. Over time, some patients notice they are busier but not better.

That pattern appears in both conventional and integrative medicine, Rakel said.

“In uncertainty, people trust the ‘expert’ that gives hope, even when piling on interventions and testing doesn’t lead to better outcomes,” he said.

Behavioral research suggests that fear of missing something—the quiet “what if”—can drive additional care.

More is not always better. If a therapy has been given adequate time and there is no clear improvement in symptoms or daily function, it may be time to reassess.

Money enforces this discipline for many families. Americans spend more than \$30 billion a year on complementary care, nearly \$15 billion of it on practitioner visits. Repeated sessions at \$50 to \$150 each can add up to thousands, often without insurance coverage.

Costs accumulate the way treatments do: one visit, one bottle, one adjustment at a time.

Rakel advises patients to pay attention to how providers sustain their practices.

“I always ask how they make their money,” he said.

Financial incentives can shape recommendations, even with the best intentions.

What Matters Most

In his practice, Rakel often narrows the conversation to a single question: “What do you want your health for?” The answers are often simple: to hike again, to play golf without wincing, to attend a wedding without calculating the nearest exit.

When that answer becomes clear, the plan sharpens.

Studies of shared decision-making suggest that when patients name what matters most, they may choose fewer tests and fewer appointments that add burden without benefit.

Complementary care is neither a cure-all nor a rebellion against science. It is one more set of tools. Used deliberately and measured honestly, it can help.

Many patients begin by searching for time—for someone who will listen. Time matters, but listening alone is not enough. The goal is not simply to be heard. It’s to be helped.

Maizes’s philosophy is to “change the question from ‘What’s the matter with you?’ to ‘What matters to you?’”

Sheramy Tsai, BSN, RN, is a seasoned nurse with a decade-long writing career. An alum of Middlebury College and Johns Hopkins, Tsai combines her writing and nursing expertise to deliver impactful content. Living in Vermont, she balances her professional life with sustainable living and raising three children.

NEXT
How to avoid the misinformation and find support on social media.



IMMUNITY

Your Immune System Runs on a Clock—How to Optimize It

Your body’s 24-hour rhythm affects how well you fight infection and disease

By Zena le Roux

Your immune cells don’t keep a steady watch. Like shift workers on a biological assembly line, they clock in and out throughout the day—surging during morning hours, retreating at night, and following an internal rhythm that determines how well your body fights everything from the flu to cancer.

A growing number of researchers believe that understanding circadian rhythms could change modern medicine.

The Body’s Hidden Schedule

Interest in how circadian rhythms shape the immune system dates back more than 50 years, to when researchers first noticed that white blood cell levels—cells that help fight infection—rise and fall throughout the day in healthy people. They also observed that animals respond differently to toxins depending on the time of exposure. The immune system, therefore, isn’t in constant operation, but follows a daily rhythm.

“Virtually all of our cells have circadian clocks and daily rhythms,” Karyn Esser, professor and chair of the Department of Physiology and Aging at the University of Florida, told The Epoch Times. “We are just beginning to learn and recognize how to support these rhythms to promote health.”

Two parts of the nervous system—the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems—work together to control the daily movement of immune cells. At night, calming signals slow the release of immune cells from the bone marrow. During the day, activating signals become stronger, encouraging immune cells to circulate throughout the body. This back-and-forth mechanism creates a daily rhythm in the movement of immune cells.

Even when immune cells are removed from the body and grown in the lab, they continue to follow near-24-hour cycles. These internal clocks control when cells move, how they produce energy, and how strongly they respond to threats.

Understanding these rhythms opens the door to better-timed immune therapies and vaccines that work with the body’s natural clock, potentially improving infection control and leading to even better outcomes in organ transplantation.

In rheumatoid arthritis, for instance, morning stiffness is worse because inflammatory signals peak in the early hours. Immune responses against cancer are stronger in the morning to early afternoon, aligning with the immune system’s most active phase of the circadian cycle. Therefore, treatments could be timed accordingly. It has also been shown that older adults vaccinated in the morning produce a stronger antibody response than those vaccinated later in the day.

Optimizing Circadian Rhythm

How can we support or optimize circadian rhythms to keep our immunity in balance?

One of the most powerful tools is sleep, a key regulator of both circadian rhythm and immune health.

“I talk about ‘circadian hygiene’—keeping a consistent routine with

sleep, exercise, and meals at the same time every day, seven days a week—in my graduate student classes and in the community,” Michelle Gumz, an associate professor of medicine at the University of Florida, told The Epoch Times.

Getting regular, consistent sleep supports effective immune responses, while sleep deprivation can increase inflammation and raise the risk of disease. Early, deep sleep in particular plays a critical role by lowering stress hormones and supporting immune signaling that helps the body fight infections. This process is tightly linked to the circadian rhythm, which times the release of immune cells and inflammatory signals to follow a daily cycle of repair and defense. When sleep is disrupted, inflammatory markers rise, and the immune system becomes less efficient at maintaining homeostasis.

Having meals at predictable times helps the body organize immune activity. Being physically active during daylight hours also reinforces daily signals, helping the immune system stay alert when it’s most needed.

What’s Next

Researchers see potential for circadian medicine to improve outcomes in infection control, organ transplantation, and chronic disease management. Monitoring circadian-related markers may even help predict disease risk and assess immune health in the future.

“It is important for clinicians to have some understanding of circadian biology and that the circadian clock mechanism modulates our cell, tissue, and system homeostasis in virtually all cells in the body,” Esser said.

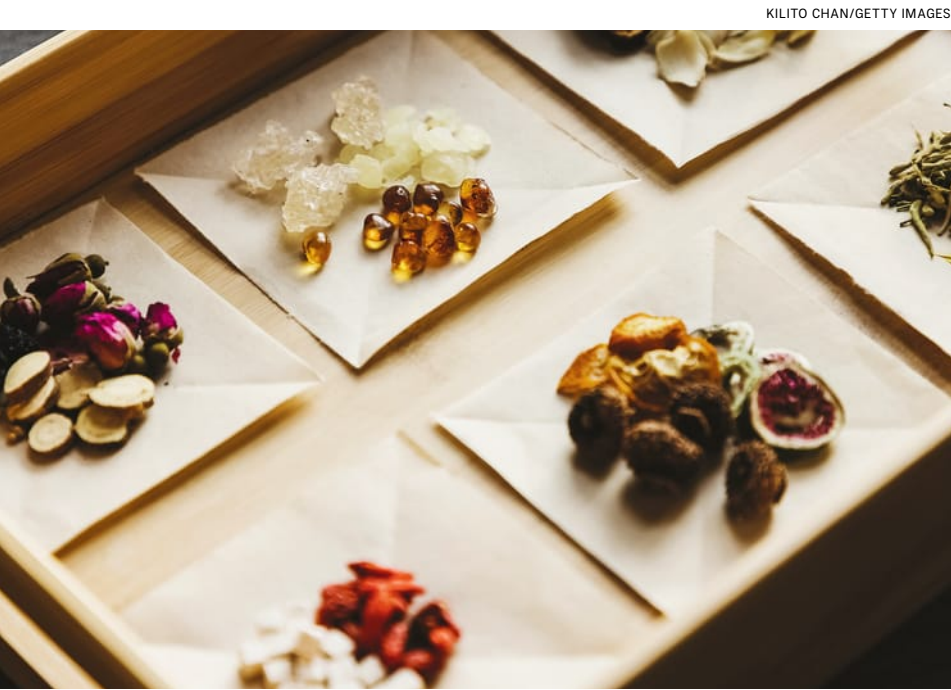
Virtually all of our cells have circadian clocks and daily rhythms. We are just beginning to learn and recognize how to support these rhythms to promote health.

Karyn Esser, professor, University of Florida

The idea of timing drug treatments—chronotherapy—is being explored in several areas of medicine. Statins, for example, are often taken at night, when the liver produces the most cholesterol. Cancer medications are also being timed to improve patient tolerance and maximize effectiveness, according to Esser.

“While more research is needed to understand differences across ages, sexes, and backgrounds, aligning our daily routines with the immune system’s natural rhythms gives a simple, practical way to support immunity and improve how our body responds to infections, vaccines, and inflammation,” she said.

Zena le Roux is a health journalist with a master’s in investigative health journalism and a certified health and wellness coach specializing in functional nutrition. She is trained in sports nutrition, mindful eating, internal family systems, and applied polyvagal theory. She works in private practice and serves as a nutrition educator for a UK-based health school.



▲ Herbal medicine remains a mainstay of common medical treatment in Europe, Asia, and most of the world.

MADE TO MOVE

5 Classic Compound Exercises for Full Body Strengthening

Some exercises, although effective, are trendy for a time and then fade away

By Kevin Shelley

I get it. You're busy and have a lot going on, and there doesn't seem to ever be enough time to do everything you want and need to do, especially when it comes to exercising. It's easy to prescribe an extensive exercise set or an exercise course that unfolds throughout the week in a one-thing-after-another format that, yes, is highly effective but that you don't always have time to do. Research detailing how effective routine exercise is abounds, and at the end of the day, we can get a substantial benefit for our bodies if we can find just a little bit of time for exercise. What, exactly, is a compound exercise, you ask? A compound exercise is a movement that engages multiple muscle groups at the same time and involves more than one joint. The exercises I've chosen for this routine involve moving

many joints simultaneously. The benefit? They're highly efficient, so you get a maximal return for the time you spend doing them. They also train your body in functional movement patterns that can benefit your everyday movements. To make this exercise set available to as many people as possible, I've modified the exercises to use a dowel stick—brooms, mops, and other long-handled items can work well, too—instead of a traditional bar. Of course, if you do have access to a bar, you can certainly go for that. These five exercises are well-known for their functional benefits, and my patients tolerate them well in the clinic. I suggest that you speak with your medical provider to ensure that they are right for you. With some modifications, these exercises let you reap the benefits of the five classic compound exercises. Quick to perform, they are easy to fit into your

lifestyle. Robust in what they deliver, they are highly effective, which is why they are regarded so highly by millions of people. I recommend performing them three days per week, or ideally, up to five times per week. I'm sure that you'll like them, and I hope that they work well for you. *Kevin Shelley is a licensed occupational therapist with over 30 years of experience in major health care settings. He is a health columnist for The Epoch Times.* *About the fitness model: Aerowenn Hunter is a health editor and fitness model for The Epoch Times. She is an accredited yoga therapist.*

For videos of these exercises, scan this QR code with your phone's camera.



Compound exercises are a great way to exercise because they engage multiple muscle groups and involve more than one joint.



At the end of the day, we can get a substantial benefit for our bodies if we can find just a little bit of time for exercise.

ALL PHOTOS BY CERIDWEN HUNTER/THE EPOCH TIMES UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

5 CLASSIC EXERCISES WITH TIMELESS BENEFITS

1 DOWEL BACK SQUAT

Squatting movements are superb, and I frequently recommend them. The classic back squat is one of the most iconic movements you'll ever see in a gym, and you can discover everything good about it in the privacy and comfort of your own home.

- STEP 1:** Hold a dowel in both hands. Place your feet slightly wider than hip-width apart with your toes slightly outward. Bring the dowel stick over your head and rest it symmetrically on your shoulders.
- STEP 2:** With your back straight and your head up, keep the dowel in position as you move into a squat. Be sure to sit back into the squat by moving your hips back as you descend, to keep your knees from going out in front of your toes. Try to move into the squat until your knees and hips are at 90 degrees of flexion. Rise back up from there into the original starting position.

- STEP 3:** Moving down and then back up counts as one repetition. Try to perform three sets of 12 repetitions. Be sure to maintain good form during this exercise; it's easy to start slumping over and lapse into poor form.
- MODIFICATIONS:** Can't move down far? Only move down as far as you can. Add weight to the bar (strap weights work well) if you want to increase the exercise's difficulty.
- WHY I LIKE IT:** You'd find it hard to beat the classic back squat for strengthening your quadriceps and gluteal muscles, and the back squat also serves a secondary role in strengthening your balance.



2 DOWEL DEADLIFT

The deadlift is a wonderful way to engage your back and core muscles, and just about everything else. It's a great exercise to build strength and work on your back mobility.

- STEP 1:** Hold a dowel in both hands, with your palms facing inward. Place your feet approximately hip-width apart.
- STEP 2:** Bend your hips and knees as you move the bar down the front of your legs and to the top of your feet. Keep your back straight and long as you descend. Once you move all the way down, slowly stand up and bring the bar back to the starting position.
- STEP 3:** Moving all the way down to your feet and then back up counts as

- one repetition. Try to perform three sets of 12 repetitions.
- MODIFICATIONS:** Add weight to the bar to increase the effectiveness of the exercise. If you can't make it all the way down to your feet, just lower the bar as far as you can before returning to standing.
- WHY I LIKE IT:** The classic deadlift is a true whole-body compound exercise, working on everything from quadriceps, hamstrings, and gluteal muscles all the way up to the muscles in your shoulder girdle. It also gives a lot of love to your core musculature.



3 DOWEL BENCH PRESS

The bench press is an upper-body strength exercise that primarily targets your triceps and pectorals. I find that it also helps strengthen your core muscles. Because most people don't have access to a proper weightlifting bench, I'm going to take this exercise decidedly old school and have you perform the press movement from the floor, or you can improvise as our demo does—just make certain the surface is stable.

- STEP 1:** Lie on your back and hold the dowel in both hands at chest level with your palms facing down.
- STEP 2:** Slowly push the weight straight up toward the ceiling until your elbows are straight. Immediately lower the dowel down slowly.
- STEP 3:** Pushing the bar up and then returning it back down to the floor counts as one repetition.

- Try to perform three sets of 12 repetitions.
- MODIFICATIONS:** If you're using a proper weight bar and want to increase the challenge, add some weights. Feel free to modify the sets and repetitions to suit your needs. If you can't push all the way up, just push up as far as you can.
- WHY I LIKE IT:** This is a classic chest-strengthening exercise that becomes extremely stable when performed from the floor level.



4 DOWEL OVERHEAD PRESS

The classic overhead press is a surefire winner on all accounts. It's a great exercise for your shoulders, providing great resistance for your deltoids and trapezius muscles, as well as your triceps muscles.

- STEP 1:** In a sitting or standing position, hold a dowel stick at collarbone height with your palms facing outward.
- STEP 2:** Slowly push the dowel straight up overhead until your elbows are straight before slowly lowering it back down into the starting position. Be sure to bring the stick straight over the top of your head when pushing up, and avoid angling your arms forward.
- STEP 3:** Pushing the weight up and then

- lowering it back down counts as one repetition. Try to perform three sets of 12 repetitions.
- MODIFICATIONS:** Feel free to modify sets and repetitions to suit your needs. Add strap weights to the bar if you want to make it more challenging. If you can't get your arms all the way up, just push them up as far as you can.
- WHY I LIKE IT:** This is a great exercise for shoulder strengthening, and also imparts a great benefit for overall shoulder mobility.



5 DOWEL PULLOVER

One of the classic five exercises is the pull-up, and I highly commend it for its effectiveness. However, it's not necessarily an exercise that's easily accessible for people at home. Thus, let me introduce the dowel pullover, which can be performed right after the floor bench press. True, it's not in the same league as the pull-up, but almost everybody reading this will be able to do it.

- STEP 1:** Lie on the floor or a bench. Hold the dowel in the same position as the earlier bench press exercise. Push the weight straight up until your elbows are straight. Slowly lower the dowel overhead until your hands touch the floor or your arms are parallel to the floor. This is the starting position.
- STEP 2:** Keeping your elbow straight, lift your arms until the dowel is straight up overhead. Lower it back down to the floor, keeping your elbows straight. This counts as one repetition.

- STEP 3:** Try to perform three sets of 12 repetitions.
- MODIFICATION:** As with other exercises, feel free to add weight to make the activity more challenging. Can't go all the way down to the floor with your hands? Lower them down as far as you can. As you stretch into the movement, you should gain some range of motion.
- WHY I LIKE IT:** This exercise is a reasonable alternative to the pull-up and is accessible to most people.





Your Mind Can Make Muscles Stronger, Here’s How

Continued from B1

neural adaptation. Essentially, your nervous system learns to communicate better with your muscles, allowing it to recruit more muscle fibers at once, fire them faster, and coordinate their movement more smoothly. Over time, the muscles adapt to increased demand, becoming larger and stronger, and eventually the dominant contributors to growth and strength. However, as many gym-goers have experienced, gains in growth and strength tend to plateau. Leveling off occurs because the mind and body have adapted to the current stress load, and it takes new or more intense workouts to signal the brain to begin teaching the muscles how to respond to the increased demand. The mind–muscle connection functions much like an orchestra, Josh Schlottman, a certified strength and conditioning specialist and fitness coach, told The Epoch Times.

The brain is the conductor that directs the musicians (the muscles) when to play, how loud to play (the level of force generated), and the tempo (the speed of movement), he said. A muscle contraction starts with an electrochemical signal sent from the brain, down the spinal cord to the motor neuron that connects to muscle fibers. The strength of the contractions is dictated by the quality and intensity of this signal, according to Schlottman. Since a strong mind–muscle connection depends on communication between the brain and muscles, people with certain injuries or health conditions, such as multiple sclerosis or stroke, may find it more challenging to tap into it.

“If the neurological connection between the brain and the muscle is damaged, then the ability to create a mind–muscle connection will be harder,” Eric Dallman, a chiropractor and certified functional strength coach, told The Epoch Times. **During a workout, a person can use internal focus and visualization to strengthen the mind–muscle connection.** The practice of “psyching up,” or priming the mind before a workout, is just as important as physical preparation or technical skill. Done effectively, it can boost performance by up to 65 percent, according to a study published in the Journal of Sports Science & Medicine. Strategies to psych up for a workout include mental imagery, a technique that

uses the imagination and senses to picture the planning, practice, and performance you want to achieve. A 2023 review found that practicing motivational self-talk and harnessing emotions such as anger or excitement are other ways to get your mind in the game and boost strength and performance. Examples of motivational self-talk include phrases such as “I am strong and powerful” or “I can do this.” These strategies work by increasing focus and activating the body’s fight-or-flight response to prepare for action. When a person is appropriately “fired up,” adrenaline and noradrenaline rise, reaction time improves, and the brain sends a stronger signal to working muscles, Dr. Rab Nawaz Khan, an internist specializing in neurology in the UK, told The Epoch Times. It also focuses attention and reduces perceived effort for a short time, allowing a person to commit fully to the movement.

The 3,000-Year-Old Herb Sharpening Modern Minds

Continued from B1

plant’s primary active compounds) or a placebo daily for 12 weeks. The group taking Bacopa showed significant improvements across multiple measures: verbal short-term, spatial short-term, visuospatial working, episodic, and working memory. Cognitive functions, including concentration, reasoning, alertness, and mental flexibility, also improved. Other benefits reported included improved anxiety and sleep quality, reduced cortisol levels, and increased brain-derived neurotrophic factor levels. Brain-derived neurotrophic factor is a critical protein that the brain needs to promote the growth, survival, and maintenance of neurons. It is also vital for the brain’s plasticity—strengthening connections between neurons—essential for learning, memory, and cognitive function. The study authors also noted that concentration improved significantly within three hours of a single dose of Bacopa. Clinical herbalist Geo Derick Giordano, who has worked extensively with Bacopa, calls it “the number one herb in India for the brain, cognition, and memory.” In traditional Ayurvedic practice, it’s given to children to enhance learning and to older adults experiencing cognitive decline.

Neuroprotection Scientific studies are also validating Bacopa’s neuroprotective effects. According to the authors of a 2024 systematic review investigating Bacopa’s neuroprotective and cognitive-enhancing actions, Bacopa can repair damaged neurons, restore synaptic function, improve nerve transmission, and improve neuroprotection. It also has antioxidant and anti-apoptotic actions, meaning that it inhibits apoptosis (programmed cell death) and promotes cell survival. The team found that in the 22 clinical trials included in the review, Bacopa reduced oxidative stress and pro-inflammatory biomarker levels, both hallmarks of neurodegenerative diseases. Bacopa monnieri proved effective in optimizing cognitive performance, specifically by improving memory retention, learning capacity, and attention span. The research highlights its ability to stabilize emotional and psychiatric well-being, showing marked improvements in symptoms of depression, impulsivity, and anhedonia (the inability to experience pleasure). Additionally, participants experienced improved sleep routines and reductions in both hyperactivity and attention deficits, suggesting that Bacopa may serve as a

Bacopa’s use as a brain tonic in traditional Ayurvedic practice has been affirmed by modern research.



MD AMIR HOSSAIN/GETTY IMAGES

comprehensive tool for managing complex psychological and developmental challenges. **Brain Trauma** Bacosides, Bacopa’s main active ingredients, are plant chemicals known as triterpenoid saponins. When we take Bacopa, our bodies convert bacosides into new compounds—ebelin lactone and bacosgenin A1—which are more potent and can more easily cross the blood-brain barrier, herbalist Karta Purkh Singh Khalsa, who specializes in Ayurvedic, Western, and traditional Chinese herbs, told The Epoch Times. These new compounds and their actions may help explain Bacopa’s powerful effects on the brain. Herbalist and author David Winston frequently uses Bacopa for patients recovering from head trauma, and often in combination with St. John’s wort, ginkgo biloba, and holy basil, he wrote in his book “Adaptogens: Herbs for Strength, Stamina, and Stress Relief.” In the book, he shares a story of working with a woman who survived bacterial meningitis. Her vision, hearing, sense of smell, and ability to speak were severely impaired, and she could not read, work, or even hold a conversation. After taking

ANDREW MERRY/GETTY IMAGES

Your mind can give your muscles a boost when they need it most.

were able to hold the crow pose for over 10 seconds in less than two weeks,” Watts said. “This success rate was much higher than that of all other groups of students who had attempted to master the crow pose through physical repetition alone.”

Get Stronger by Imagining Muscle Contractions

A person can build muscle strength by simply rehearsing movement in the mind without physically performing the exercise—a technique known as motor imagery.

A small 2025 study published in Frontiers in Psychology found that older adults who practiced motor imagery by imagining their arm pushing against a heavy object five times per week for eight weeks had a 22 percent increase in muscle strength.

Older research that included 30 adults found that participants who physically performed finger contractions increased their finger strength by 53 percent. However, those who simply imagined moving a finger or performed mental finger contractions improved finger strength by 35 percent. Participants in the control group who did not engage in mental or physical finger exercises showed no improvements in strength.

Mental rehearsal activates many of the same brain networks used for real movement, including motor planning areas and the primary motor cortex, according to Khan. Repeating that activation can improve the brain’s ability to send a clean, strong signal down the motor pathway, even without muscle growth.

“In simple terms, you are practicing the wiring and timing, not building the muscle fibers. The gains are usually modest but real, especially early in training or during rehabilitation when physical loading is limited,” he said.

The brain can also transfer some of the strength gained during motor imagery training from one side of the body to the other—a phenomenon known as bilateral transfer.

Bilateral transfer is when training one limb improves strength or skill in the other untrained limb. It happens because the brain areas that plan and control movement communicate across both sides of the brain and because training strengthens those shared motor programs, Khan said.

A 2023 systematic review found that participants who engaged in motor imagery training showed moderate but significant improvements in bilateral transfer strength compared with those in the non-imagery group. The positive effects of motor imagery were similar to those of physical training.

While more research is needed, these findings suggest that motor imagery could help people recover from movement-related health conditions, such as stroke, during rehabilitation.

How to Tap Into the Mind–Muscle Connection

Improving your mind–muscle connection involves training your nervous system to recruit more muscle fibers, activate them faster, and coordinate movements more efficiently.

Having a pre-exercise routine can help

ILLUSTRATION BY THE EPOCH TIMES. SHUTTERSTOCK

The Power of Visualization

Multiple studies have asked participants to imagine or visualize a movement and then observed improved performance.

Visualized doing resistance training



+15 lbs bench press

+22 % strength in older adults



Imagined pushing a heavy object

Performed mental finger contractions



+35 % finger strength

“The key is the dose, too much [psyching up] can make technique sloppy and increase injury risk,” Khan said.

In addition to mental preparation, using visualization during a workout or competition can also help increase strength by activating the same brain regions and neural pathways involved in physical movement.

For example, a 2020 study published in Impulse involving 133 participants found that people who visualized themselves performing bench presses or other resistance-training exercises were able to lift up to 15 pounds more. Those who didn’t practice visualization could only lift an additional 5 pounds.

“Visualizing the muscle fibers contracting as you generate force and then stretching back out under control as you slow down and release significantly enhances the level of activation of the muscles involved beyond what mechanical repetition alone can achieve,” Meera Watts, a holistic yoga expert and founder and CEO of Siddhi Yoga International, told The Epoch Times.

In one example from Watts’s teaching practice, her team worked with a group of 25 students in their 200-hour certification class who were struggling to perform the crow pose, which requires significant engagement of the core muscles.

“When we instructed them to visualize the serratus anterior muscle protracting or pulling forward instead of simply attempting to lift their body weight, 18 of these students

the brain associate certain actions with physical activity, priming the nervous system to perform at its best. For example, a runner who feels tired before a run might suddenly feel energized just by putting on their running shoes.

During a workout, a person can use internal focus and visualization to strengthen the mind–muscle connection.

The ability to connect with and contract a certain muscle during a specific movement can help increase the output of the movement, according to Dallman.

“If someone can consciously connect with their quadriceps during the concentric phase of a squat, they should be able to complete the rep at a higher load,” he said.

When resistance training, instead of focusing on the outcome, such as moving the weight from A to B, a person should focus on the specific muscle contracting, Schlottman said. For example, they can focus on squeezing the biceps during a biceps curl rather than lifting the dumbbell.

“You can increase the mind–muscle connection by visualizing the muscle’s behavior before and during a set,” he said.

Just like Schwarzenegger did.

According to Schlottman, other ways to boost the mind–muscle connection include:

- During the warm-up period, perform the movement without any weight, and focus on creating strong internal tension.
- Mentally rehearse a successful lift before approaching the weight. Clear the mind of any lingering doubts and visualize a positive result.
- While doing repetitions, imagine the muscle becoming tighter, which can force the target muscles to do most of the work, rather than the supporting muscles.

Schlottman uses mind–muscle connection techniques with his clients, especially older adults and people recovering from injuries.

“One of my clients has an elbow injury [and] can’t do heavy bicep curls. So I use lighter weights and have him combine that with intense internal focus on the biceps,” he said. “This keeps him from aggravating the injury and maximizing muscle tension by limiting mechanical efficiency.”

Mind Over Matter Has Its Limits

Everyone knows that working the muscles can make them stronger. Many also know that working out the body is also good for the mind. Learning how to engage the mind before and during exercise can make consistent physical movement even more effective.

However, even a strong mind–muscle connection can’t eliminate the need to follow through with the physical process of building muscle and dexterity.

“While the mind maximizes the use of the available equipment, it cannot replace the need for gradual progression in load and adequate nutrition and recovery,” Watts said.

For those looking to elevate their fitness routines, learning to engage their mental muscles can be a free, safe, and proven strategy to increase strength and unlock new levels of performance.

Kimberly Drake is a health journalist and newspaper columnist with a decade of experience covering health and wellness topics. Her work has appeared in Healthline, Medical News Today, and other online and print publications. She also serves as governance board vice president for two charter schools for autistic students.

an herbal formula containing Bacopa for just one month, she completely recovered, saying that she was “back to normal, and maybe even better than that.”

Stress and Anxiety Reduction

Bacopa is an adaptogen, meaning that it helps us better adapt to the effects of stress—one of its traditional uses in Ayurveda.

It rejuvenates the mind, calms the nervous system, and is used for anxiety and stress.

Bacopa supports calm, clarity, and emotional resilience, Khalsa said, and is commonly used when the mind is overstimulated, which can manifest as irritability, insomnia, or mental fatigue.

A 2021 study examined the effect of Bacopa on depression, anxiety, and stress among people between the ages of 12 and 60 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants took two 500-mg Bacopa capsules after breakfast and dinner daily for 30 days. The researchers found that the participants had a significant decrease in depression, anxiety, and stress scores after using Bacopa for one month, highlighting its effectiveness in psychological health.

How to Take Bacopa

Bacopa is generally considered safe, with a standard dosage of dried, powdered herb ranging from 2 to 10 grams, Khalsa said.

It can be taken in powder, capsule, or

liquid extract form, and found in health food stores and online—just ensure that you are getting a quality product and that it is grown organically to avoid unnecessary impurities.

Khalsa recommends buying Bacopa from a verified high-quality vendor with a good reputation among clinical professionals.

Because Bacopa grows in wet, potentially contaminated environments, sourcing is critical.

“I grow my own because it grows in ditches in India—and I would not want to get it from there,” Giordano, who runs The Sanctuary Wellness Center in Virginia, said. “I just want to make sure it’s clean.”

Although Bacopa is a great plant, it is bitter, so she makes it into a glycerite to sweeten it.

Glycerites are herbs made into a concentrated liquid extract, similar to alcohol tinctures. However, instead of alcohol, glycerites use vegetable glycerin as the solvent to extract the herbs’ medicinal properties. Glycerites are highly versatile, gentle, sweet-tasting, and do not need to be refrigerated. They are an excellent alternative to alcohol tinctures and are often used for children, pets, or those wishing to avoid alcohol. Glycerites can be stored for one to two years if kept in a cool, dark place.

Bacopa is considered safe and well-tolerated. Some studies suggest that the most

common side effects are gastrointestinal discomfort such as abdominal cramps, increased stool frequency, and nausea.

Always work with a qualified herbalist to get the appropriate dosage for you, especially if you have health conditions or are on medication. The American Herbalists Guild maintains a database of qualified herbalists trained in a variety of herbal traditions.

You may see Bacopa called “brahmi” in Ayurvedic contexts, although this name is also used for gotu kola, a different herb, so be sure that you know which you are getting. The term derives from “Brahman,” meaning “universal

consciousness” in Vedic philosophy—fitting for a plant long used as a brain tonic.

Final Thoughts

With the increase in neurodegenerative disorders such as dementia, and a growing percentage of the population experiencing anxiety and depression and feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by stress, Bacopa seems to be an ancient herb made for modern times. Its relative ubiquity and ease of growth, both outdoors and in, make it an excellent choice for your garden—and your medicine cabinet.

SOMNATH MAHATA/GETTY IMAGES

Bacopa is often brewed into a tea when used in Ayurvedic medicine.





MINDSET MATTERS

Storms Don't Break Us, They Reveal Who We Are

Calm periods can hide small compromises, overlooked habits, and signs of imbalance

By Tatiana Denning

“Life is a storm, my young friend. You will bask in the sunlight one moment, be shattered on the rocks the next. What makes you a man is what you do when that storm comes.”—the film “The Count of Monte Cristo,” directed by Kevin Reynolds (Touchstone Pictures, 2002).

Every life ebbs and flows between calm waters, shifting currents, and, at times, tempestuous storms.

During times of ease, we often drift along with the current. Life may feel smooth and comfortable, wrapped in work, routine, entertainment, and the accumulation of things—and we may quietly assume that the calm will last.

In such periods, it becomes easy to overlook small compromises in our behavior, excuse harmful words or actions, and ignore the subtle signs that something is out of balance. When nothing challenges us, we seldom stop to consider our choices, habits, or the direction in which we’re heading.

But when the storm comes, everything changes. It interrupts our momentum, forcing us to stop and face it.

In the storm, we are often forced to face what we might otherwise avoid or ignore. It strips away the ego and life’s distractions, revealing patterns that we might miss and exposing the subtle truths about ourselves that everyday life often hides.

Whether it’s the literal storms of nature or the metaphorical storms of life—those that disrupt our work, finances, family, relationships, or health—storms are inevitable, and some are even life-altering. It is not a question of if they will come, but when and in what form. We cannot avoid them, and we are rarely able to outrun them.

Sometimes they come one at a time; other times, they converge, crashing

down all at once, leaving us gasping for air in the deluge. What we once took for granted suddenly becomes uncertain or disappears; the familiar no longer reassures us.

In these moments, we may feel lost, shaken to our core—unsure of what to do next or what lies ahead. Yet, hidden within the storm is an unexpected gift for those willing to see it: The storm slows us, stills us, invites us to look again—with sincerity, honesty, and a fresh perspective.

In this way, the storm becomes our teacher.

Lessons From the Storm

Storms reveal the impermanence we live within. What once felt stable—our routines, our assumptions, our sense of security—can shift in an instant. Within this impermanence lies opportunity: the chance to see what truly matters, and to loosen our grip on what is temporary.

In the storm, we strengthen our resilience, courage, and adaptability. Storms push us beyond our comfort zones, forcing us to adjust, endure, and find new footing when the ground beneath us gives way. These insights are not just philosophical—they’re supported by science.

Research shows that cultivating resilience is linked not only to lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, but also to a reduced risk of physical conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. In other words, how we navigate life’s storms can shape both our minds and our bodies.

Resilience often becomes most visible in those who have endured life-altering challenges. Survivors of major disasters often experience post-traumatic growth, discovering new strengths, forming deeper connections with others, and gaining a renewed sense of purpose. The same is true for survivors of serious illness. For example, many long-term cancer survivors report a deeper appreciation for life, greater personal strength, and improved quality of life—even years after their diagnosis.

The storm also teaches humility—the recognition of our limits and the understanding that true strength lies in responding with patience, honesty, and grace. Storms deepen our gratitude. After enduring hardship, periods of calm are no longer taken for granted. We become more aware of peace when it returns and more appreciative of what truly matters: family, acts of kindness, and the everyday moments that once seemed ordinary.

Storms push us beyond our comfort zones, forcing us to adjust, endure, and find new footing when the ground beneath us gives way.

In confronting fear, uncertainty, or loss of control, we come to know ourselves more deeply—it is here that our character is revealed.

Research shows that people who, in challenging times, draw on their faith find strength in it, often reporting a strengthened sense of meaning, renewed purpose, and reinforced belief.

Alongside these lessons, the storm teaches us the importance of how we respond. It is not the event itself, but how we face difficulty that shapes who we become. Some respond with anger, denial, selfishness, dishonesty, confusion, or resistance; others meet it with self-reflection, clarity of thought, forgiveness, the intention to improve, and steady, calm composure.

In confronting fear, uncertainty, or loss of control, we come to know ourselves more deeply—it is here that one’s character is revealed. Through mindful reflection and responses rooted in kindness and integrity, one’s character is gradually strengthened.

When the storm comes, we’re given the chance to pause, reflect, and view ourselves, others, or a situation in a new light—gaining awareness of where we can grow, improve, and act with greater wisdom.

Ancient Understandings

To the ancient Chinese, storms—whether in nature or in human life—were intimately connected, seen as reflections of the same underlying order. Severe storms were often interpreted as signs that balance had been disrupted among heaven, earth, and humanity. Both natural disasters and personal or societal upheavals were viewed as warnings that people had strayed from proper conduct or had neglected virtue. This perspective emphasized accountability: When harmony was broken by corruption, greed, or other moral failings, disorder appeared in both the natural world and human society.

In this way, storms served as reminders to restore balance, cultivate humility, and seek moral clarity. Confucian teachings reinforced this view, portraying hardship as a test of virtue—revealing whether a person could remain upright, disciplined, and humane in the face of challenging circumstances. Storms, therefore, required reflection and correction, not complaint.

In ancient Greece, Aristotle understood nature’s upheavals as part of the world’s inherent unpredictability, while human suffering revealed whether one had cultivated enough virtue to remain steady under pressure. For him, a good life was not one free from difficulty, but one in which a person learned to act rightly despite it.

The periods of calm after hardship can help us appreciate what we have.



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Plato, meanwhile, suggested that disorder in the world often mirrored disorder in the soul. Turbulence—whether in the environment or in life—forced confrontation with truth and unexamined values. In this way, storms and suffering were regarded as necessary trials: forces that honed judgment, tested self-discipline, clarified priorities, and exposed illusion, ultimately strengthening moral character.

For the Stoics, life’s storms were likewise inevitable and necessary. Nature was governed by reason, and human beings could control only their responses, not external events. A life without hardship offered few opportunities to cultivate virtue; it was through adversity that character was tested, shaped, and strengthened. Through the storm, the soul learned to align with the natural order of the universe.

Across traditions, storms were never meaningless. They were lessons—sometimes even a form of repayment, reminders that our actions and choices carry consequences. When the storm comes, rather than asking, “Why is this happening to me?” ancient wisdom urges us to ask, “What is this teaching me?” Those who’ve lived long enough come to understand that it is usually in times of hardship that we gain our deepest insight.

So the next time the storm comes, let it slow you down. Let it humble you. Let it create the space for you to reflect, listen, and see things anew—it may very well be guiding you toward a wiser, truer version of yourself.

Remember that while calm waters may allow one to drift, it is the storm that teaches one how to stand.

Tatiana Denning, D.O. is a preventive family medicine physician. She believes in empowering patients with the tools, knowledge and skills needed to improve their health by focusing on mindfulness, healthy habits, and weight management.

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE

Life’s trials can help us reflect on ourselves and find new clarity and strength. This process can help us become more self aware, adaptable, and resilient.

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▲ Neuroscience and lived experience tell us that exposing ourselves to our fears helps us break away from their restrictive hold on us.

MINDSET

Why Your Brain Overreacts to Fear

Gradual exposure to fear can rewire your brain and reduce anxiety

By Debbie Cohen

We’ve all been there: that jolt of panic before a job interview, the knot in your stomach while public speaking, the dread during a difficult conversation. Your heart pounds, your breath turns shallow, and your palms sweat. Your body reacts as if physical danger is imminent, even when it’s not.

This surge of anxiety stems from your brain’s fight-or-flight response. It is designed to protect us from threats, but modern life sets it off every time we get stuck in traffic or think that our coworker is upset with us. When activated repeatedly, it can fuel high blood pressure, weakened immunity, anxiety disorders, and burnout.

Getting the fight-or-flight response properly tuned requires a counterintuitive solution. Neuroscience suggests that we need to expose ourselves to what unsettles us.

Why Modern Stress Makes Fear Harder to Regulate

If our collective mental health is any indicator, people are struggling. According to research from Moodle, conducted by Censuswide, approximately 284 million people, or about 3.5 percent of the world’s total population, have an anxiety disorder, while 66 percent of American employees report experiencing burnout.

These aren’t separate problems; they’re symptoms of brains stuck in perpetual threat mode, unable to distinguish between psychological discomfort and physical danger.

The Epoch Times asked Supatra Tovar, a licensed clinical psychologist and wellness expert, how these findings reflect acute stress turning into chronic stress. Tovar said chronic tension is directly linked to the brain’s fear circuitry.

The amygdala becomes harder to regulate when a person is exposed to repeated uncertainty or alarm.

“Over time, the nervous system starts treating these inputs like real danger, making it difficult for the body to return to a calm baseline,” she said.

Why Your Brain Overreacts

At the center of our fear response is the amygdala, an almond-sized structure deep in the brain responsible for detecting threats and triggering rapid emotional reactions. However, it can be trained to calm down.

How can something the size of an almond cause so much trouble? Because its job lies at the heart of human experience. The amygdala is the region of the brain associated with emotional processing, and it constantly scans for threats, much like a smoke detector ready to sound the alarm.

Under normal circumstances, the logical prefrontal cortex runs the show, handling executive function and rational decision-making. However, when the amygdala senses danger, it hijacks the system entirely.

“That irritation shows up in the autonomic nervous system,” Dr. Allan Bernstein, a California-based neurologist who has spent decades bridging the gap between scientific investigation and clinical practice, told The Epoch Times.

“These changes happen automatically and instantly.”

When this protective system becomes hypersensitive, it can trick the brain into perceiving threats where none exist. The amygdala doesn’t distinguish between real-time danger and imagined scenarios. It can be activated by memories, hypothetical fears, or sensory cues such as standing near the edge of a high balcony, even if you’ve never fallen.

“Once you know how the amygdala works, you can stop being afraid of your own reactions,” Bernstein said. “And once you’re not afraid of the reaction itself, you can learn how to slow it down.”

Steps for Retraining Your Fear Response

The brain is capable of change throughout life, a quality known as neuroplasticity. One study shows that an effective way to retrain fear circuits is through gradual, controlled exposure to anxiety-provoking situations. However, patience is key, as it’s a process that requires repetition and can take months to master.

Rewiring the brain is best approached in small, manageable steps, according to Pankhuri Aggarwal, who holds a doctorate in clinical psychology. An assistant professor of psychology at the University of Cincinnati, she has studied how culture and context shape mental health.

The amygdala learns from direct experience, while the prefrontal cortex learns from interpretation, Aggarwal told The Epoch Times.

Rewiring the brain is best approached in small, manageable steps.

“When someone gradually engages with something that makes them anxious while still feeling safe, the amygdala begins to realize that the situation is not dangerous, and the prefrontal cortex becomes more efficient at down-regulating that fear response,” she said. “We sometimes describe this as building the ‘fear-regulation muscle.’”

3 Elements That Make Exposure Effective

Essentially, repeated, tolerable exposures help the brain form new associations, shifting from threat to safety. Over time, the prefrontal cortex becomes quicker and more automatic in calming the amygdala.

Aggarwal emphasized that fear responses shift most effectively when several conditions are present:

- Predictability, so you know what to expect
- A sense of control, meaning that you choose to engage rather than being forced
- Repeated practice, which allows the brain to learn through experience

“People gain confidence surprisingly quickly once they learn that the initial spike of fear does not last forever,” she said. “That realization alone can dramatically shift how their brain responds in the future.”

For example, an actor suffering from stage fright is usually less nervous after opening night. With each subsequent performance, the brain learns: “I survived.

Nothing bad happened. I can do this.”

Aggarwal cautioned against common mistakes people make when trying to face their fears, including going too big too fast, avoiding discomfort, and facing fear without support or structure. For people with severe anxiety or trauma histories, she said, these steps are best taken with the support of a mental health professional.

Resilience, she stressed, is not the absence of fear.

“Fear is an adaptive part of how we stay safe,” she said. “Resilience comes from recalibrating the fear system so it responds proportionately. Small, consistent steps toward feared situations help people feel capable again, and that sense is often what truly changes lives.”

Habits That Reset Your Stress Response

To counter chronic stress, Aggarwal advised building simple, consistent habits that signal safety to the nervous system, including:

- Slow, steady breathing
- Brief, grounding pauses
- Mindful movement
- Limits on news and social media consumption
- Reconnection with others in real life

“Human connection is not just comforting; it is biologically stabilizing, helping the brain recalibrate away from chronic threat and back toward balance,” she said.

She noted that even small steps—a short walk outside, a phone call with a friend, or a few minutes of controlled breathing—help deactivate unnecessary fight-or-flight responses.

Reframing How We View Fear

Although most people want to avoid things that make them anxious, fear is not our enemy. Doing the thing that scares us can be an opportunity for growth.

Thomas Plante, who holds a doctorate in clinical psychology and is a psychology professor at Santa Clara University in California, told The Epoch Times, “This might seem counterintuitive, but research over many years and with many different populations has clearly indicated that gradual exposure to fears helps us to overcome them.”

This approach, known clinically as exposure therapy with response prevention, is one of the most evidence-based treatments for anxiety disorders and fears. It is effective for situations that often cause anxiety, such as public speaking, as well as specific phobias, including the fears of snakes, spiders, and airplanes.

The Takeaway

Fear isn’t the villain. It’s a signal that evolved to protect us, even if it sometimes misfires in modern life. However, it does not have to hijack the body.

With awareness and consistent practice, experts say, unnecessary fear can be reshaped into a source of resilience rather than a threat to our well-being.

Debbie Cohen is a longtime features writer with a strong background in nonprofit storytelling and human-interest reporting. Her articles have appeared in *Lifestyles Magazine*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Kaiser Health News*, *Pregnancy Magazine*, and *Benefit Magazine*.



DEADLY DISEASES MAY BE COMING TO YOUR DOORSTEP

Tuberculosis. Chagas. Malaria. Hemorrhagic fevers.

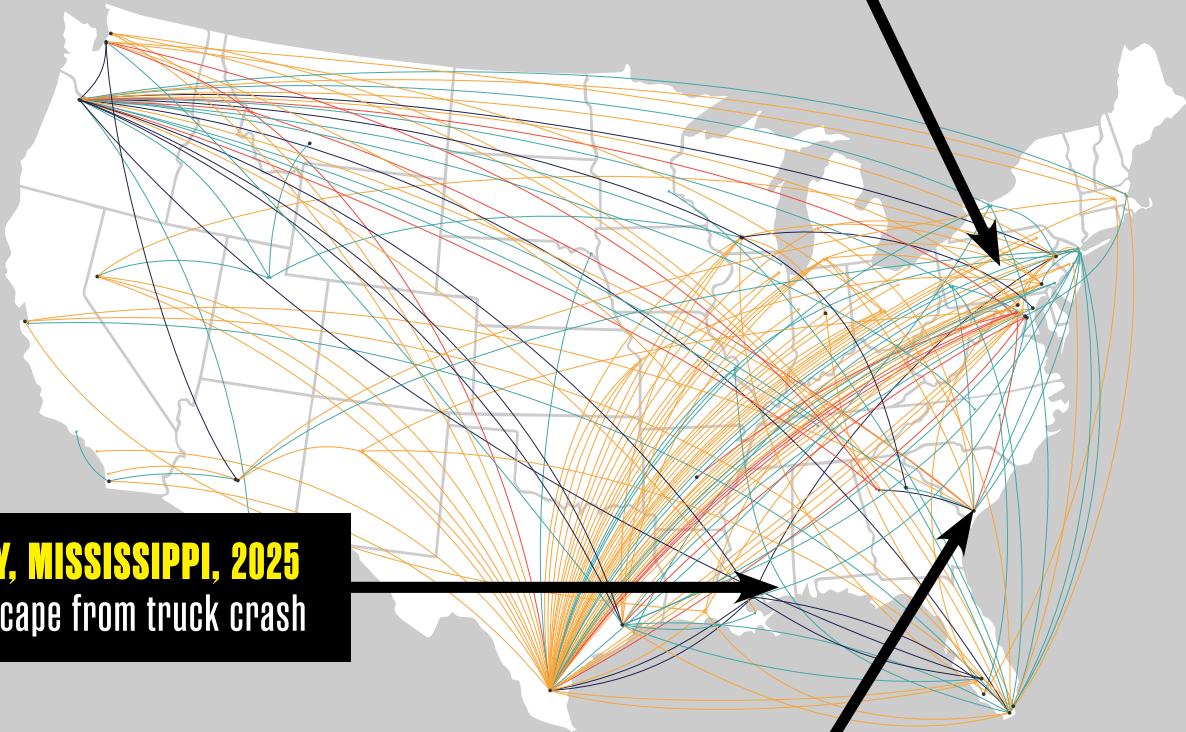


DANVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA, 2022
Three monkeys escape from truck crash

JASPER COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI, 2025
Eight monkeys escape from truck crash

YEMASSEE, SOUTH CAROLINA, 2014–2024
More than 70 monkeys escape from breeding facility

A vast and largely unregulated transport pipeline moves thousands of laboratory-bound monkeys from foreign suppliers in Asia and Africa to the U.S. every year. The monkeys are then trucked on major highways across the country. This sprawling system—from foreign forests to airports to holding facilities to labs—creates ideal conditions for dangerous pathogens carried by the monkeys to emerge and spread undetected.



Truck drivers may not know they’re moving disease along with the monkeys. Communities they pass through are unaware. When a truck crashes, first responders get no guidance on how to deal with the unique biosecurity risks.

Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.,
thank you for pledging to investigate.
We urge you to ban monkey imports.



HISTORY
A troubled Leo Tolstoy set on a life-changing pilgrimage. c4

BOOK REVIEW
Ethan Gutmann’s harrowing account of live organ-harvesting in China. c5

Life & Tradition

THE EPOCH TIMES

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The era of mass market paperbacks is coming to an end. c6

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SMALL TOWNS

Revitalizing Rural America

How to succeed in small-town America: add vision, community building, and entrepreneurial grit

By Walker Larson

At the height of the farm crisis of the 1980s, Wendell Berry wrote in a new foreword to the “The Unsettling of America”: “Farmers are losing their farms, some are killing themselves, some in the madness of despair are killing other people, and rural economy and rural life are gravely stricken. ... We are closer every day to the final destruction of private ownership not only of small family farms, but of small usable properties of all kinds.”

The great “unsettling” detailed in Berry’s book unfolded as agriculture became industrialized in the 1970s and 1980s and

government policy pushed farmers to scale their operations and produce larger yields per acre. As a result of the spiraling cycle of rapid expansion and the implementation of factory-style farming techniques, fewer farmers did more work with greater debt loads. Then, in the 1980s, an increase in interest rates, a drop in exports, and a plummet in land and crop prices pulled the rug out from under the whole unstable system.

Many farmers went bankrupt, and farming families were displaced from their farms and driven to the cities by economic necessity. With the evaporation of small family farms and the corporatization of large ones, economic opportunity in rural America dwindled. There was no longer

With the evaporation of small family farms and the corporatization of large ones, economic opportunity in rural America dwindled.

a sufficient population nor sufficient economic health to maintain local economies. Many small rural towns became virtual ghost towns as a result. Their once-vibrant main streets consist of boarded-up, disheveled, and dilapidated old buildings standing blankly beside an empty street, a kind of architectural cemetery of a past America.

Commenting on that collapse, business consultant, entrepreneur, and Iowa native Danna Larson told The Epoch Times, “The farm crisis was devastating to rural America, especially the Midwest, and it left a lot of people with no option but to leave.”

In her friend group growing up, there was an unspoken assumption that after

Continued on C2



▲ Antique tractor owners ride their tractors at the annual Loess Hills Tractor Ride in Iowa.



▲ The Sac County Fairground has hosted the county fair for over 150 years.

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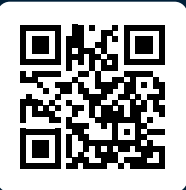
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SCAN TO LISTEN HERE

▲ Danna Larson promotes rural revitalization by helping small-town leaders develop economic visions rooted in local identity and community cooperation.

SMALL TOWNS

Revitalizing Rural America

Continued from C1

high school, they’d have to leave their rural towns and go to the cities permanently to have a future.

“It just kind of felt like dreams were out of reach here after that,” she said. “The sad truth is, a lot of them were because of the effects of all of that. That’s when a major shift happened in rural America, and people went to the cities because they had to.”

But things have changed. Now, Larson argues, the assumption that economic prosperity and a fulfilling career are impossible in small-town America is outdated.

“That mindset has stuck around for longer than it probably should at this point,” she said.

Although the attitude might have made sense when Larson graduated from college, it doesn’t anymore, largely because of the employment opportunities created by the internet.

“When I graduated in public relations, there were no jobs for that in rural America,” she said. “But now I could absolutely do that from right here on the farm.”

Larson’s on a mission that agricultural sage Berry would likely approve of. She’s determined to prove to people that entrepreneurial dreams and financial success are well within reach in rural America—and through that message, she hopes to revitalize America’s small towns.

“We’ve got to change this mindset that’s been, you know, here for decades now, of like, well, if you really have big dreams, you probably better go to the city to live those out,” she said.

Through her platform, Rural Revival, Larson tells the stories of successful small-town businesses and leaders. She also offers consulting to businesses and municipal leaders looking to revive their towns. The stories Larson tells on her podcast are stories of people who’ve chosen a pioneering path that paradoxically keeps them close to home: They’ve chosen not to leave their small towns and have crafted fulfilling businesses and careers to support meaningful lives in these smaller communities.

The germ of Rural Revival materialized as Larson drove back and forth between Nashville and her family farm in rural Iowa. “I would drive home to Iowa to see my family through all these small towns,” she said. “And I just kept thinking, like: ‘I’m really sad that our small town seemed to be dying off. And I would really love to see us reverse that trend.’”

Larson began to realize that others felt the same way.

“When I was living in Nashville, that was when I think there kind of started to be a shift,” she said. “A lot of people were feeling the same way I was, and I noticed that I had friends moving back to their small towns and opening up businesses.”

One such business was an old depot transformed into a bar by one of Larson’s entrepreneurial friends. One evening, Larson was enjoying live music at the depot and said to her companions, over the boom of the music: “This place is awesome, and people need to know that you can do this and actually make a living at it. Somebody needs to do a podcast or something.”

With the evaporation of small family farms and the corporatization of large ones, economic opportunity in rural America dwindled.

Larson’s friends enthusiastically encouraged her to start such a podcast, and so she did. The positive response to the podcast was overwhelming, and it led to other initiatives, such as consultations and branding services for small rural businesses and towns, speaking engagements, workshops, events, and a book, “Small Town Dreamer: Finding Courage to Chase Your Biggest Dreams in Rural America,” which became a No. 1 new release on Amazon in the self-employment category.

Larson’s efforts to rejuvenate small rural towns begin by trying to help them formulate a vision.

“That’s something I’ve really noticed in all the towns that I see that are doing a good job of being revived: There’s that visionary and then there’s also the people rallying around it to support that vision,” she said.

Sometimes, crafting the vision for the future begins by looking to the past. Larson will ask the locals, “What businesses did your town used to have?”

“Because more than likely, you know, the population is still in need of those services or stores or businesses,” she said.

It’s important, Larson says, to rub the dust from our eyes and see the familiar run-down buildings as places of opportunity. One event Larson helps run in various towns aims to do just that. It’s called the “What Could Be Tour,” and it consists of dressing up old abandoned buildings with mock storefronts and business facades and apartment spaces to help the local population visualize what’s possible. Within a year of the first tour Larson worked on, the town that put it on brought in real businesses to all four of the buildings they’d dressed up, revitalizing the downtown.

Another event Larson helps bring to small towns is called “the farm dinner.” The farm dinner involves shutting down a town’s main street and creating a communal, farm-to-table experience under the glow of strings of lights and to the hum of live music. The first iteration was such a big success that the event became the No. 1 thing people asked Larson about.

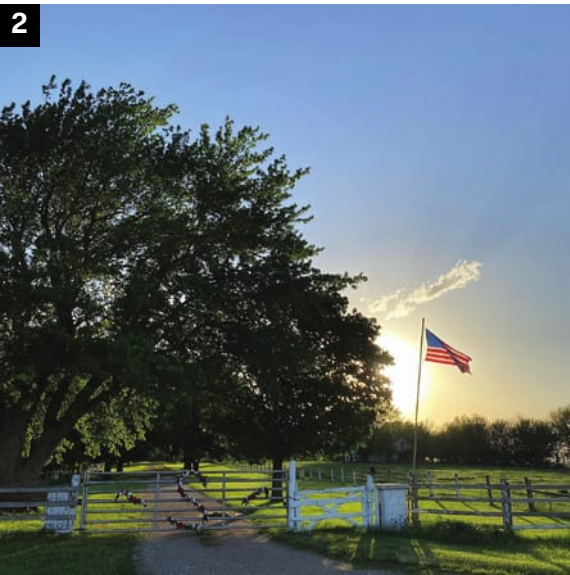
“I kind of realized I was onto something that could really help towns, because more than anything, it’s a huge momentum builder,” she said. “You give people a cool experience like that, it’s something that sticks with them, and it makes them want to do more for their town. And so I ended up putting a kit together because it was becoming impossible for me to be all these different places that people wanted to do these dinners.”

The community-building aspect of the farm dinners might be their most powerful effect. Larson said that, often, individuals in rural communities feel alone in their attempts to realize their visions. For true rural renewal, it’s essential for like-minded people to congregate around a shared understanding of the future of the town.

“One of the great qualities of rural America is that we know our neighbors’ names and we know the history of the families that live here and we know the history of the town,” Larson said. “But I think we forget that we even have that here, because it’s just part of our life. But that’s a really unique thing to rural America, and I think we have to make the most of it.”

According to Berry, the undermining of

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF DANNA LARSON UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED



1. Shared public meals such as farm dinners have long served as tools for building relationships, trust, and cooperation within communities. 2. Rural communities across the United States have experienced decades of population decline, but that’s beginning to change thanks to remote work and digital entrepreneurship. 3. Musicians add to the warm atmosphere at a farm dinner in Odebolt, Iowa. 4. A Well Worn Story in New Glarus, Wis., offers handmade leather goods.

community and culture has been perhaps the most harmful consequence of the transformation of agriculture—on top of the ecological and economic blights it introduced. Yet it’s possible to rebuild local community through simple means. Larson highlighted the importance of the local coffee shop.

“People want that sense of community, and they want a place where we can come together and you can bump into, you know, somebody that you might not see otherwise,” she said. “And so I think, you know, that’s an important role that businesses can play.”

Because people desire these kinds of spaces, a coffee shop is a business that Larson claims can work in a town of almost any size. Such businesses serve a critical role in mending the social fabric that was torn by 20th-century disruptions.

It isn’t just coffee shops. Ever the optimist, Larson said she believes that many ventures are possible in small-town America if we can recover the vision and the community support.

“I believe in the people of rural America, I believe in the people of our small towns,” she said. “I just love seeing the people who are going for it and chasing their dreams. But there are so many more dreams out there that aren’t being lived out, and so that’s part of the reason I wrote my book was just to say, what is that dream that’s been inside of you that you have buried or that you don’t feel is possible here? Like that dream is in you for a reason, and rural America needs you to live that dream out. And often-times, when one person lives out their dream, it opens the door for so many

Now, Larson says, the assumption that economic prosperity and a fulfilling career are impossible in small-town America is outdated.

other people to then live out their dream.”

What rural America needs is a new generation of “settlers”: people willing to tackle an ambitious vision with the understanding that it’s high time—and highly doable—to recover from the agricultural crisis that devastated rural communities.

Larson is here to help them do it.

Before becoming a freelance journalist and culture writer, Walker Larson taught literature and history at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife and daughter. He holds a master’s in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in *The Hemingway Review*, *Intellectual Takeout*, and his *Substack*, *The Hazelnut*. He is also the author of two novels, “Hologram” and “Song of Spheres.”

The Epoch Times Interviews Shen Yun Audiences

Shen Yun Displays a Beautiful History of China

New York-based Shen Yun Performing Arts, established in 2006, is the world’s premier classical Chinese dance and music company. Aiming for an artistic revival and celebration of China’s rich cultural heritage, the company performs classical Chinese dance, ethnic and folk dance, and story-based dance, accompanied by orchestral and solo performers.

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Columbia	S.C.	March 10-11
Midland	Texas	March 11
Miami	Fla.	March 13-15
Salt Lake City	Utah	March 13-18
El Paso	Texas	March 14
Columbus	Ga.	March 17
Montgomery	Ala.	March 18
Pittsburgh	Pa.	March 21-22
Fresno	Calif.	March 21-22
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“The female soloist, her voice filled the room, and it was also penetrating and all-encompassing. I love it.”

AIYANA SUGERMAN, *business owner, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.*

“[Shen Yun] renews your faith and humanity, that there is a belief that you need to look to our ancestors to guide us in the future.”

MIKE SCHEIDT, *company manager, Indianapolis, Ind.*

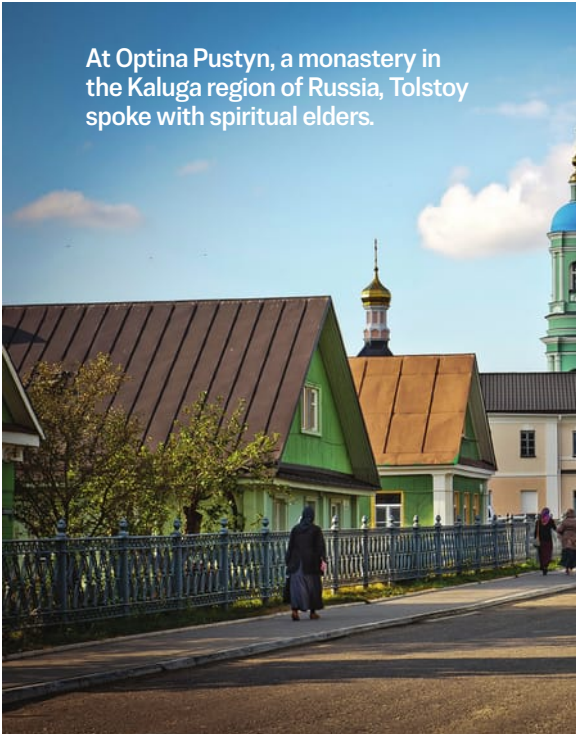
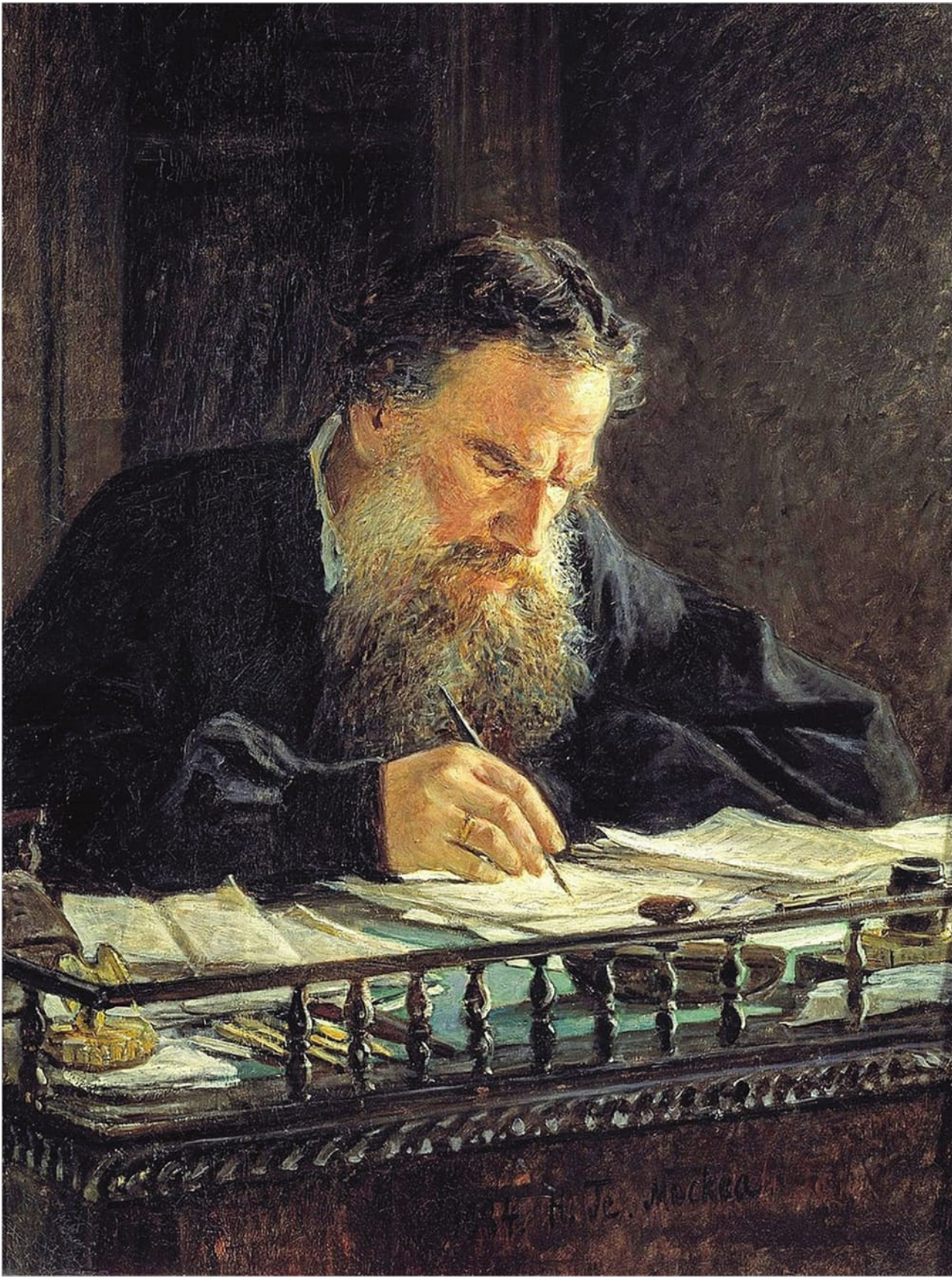
“[Shen Yun] is a lovely expression of the culture and the history that should never be lost.”

GAIL LEVIN, *retired finance executive, Charlotte, N.C.*

The Epoch Times is a proud sponsor of Shen Yun Performing Arts. We have covered audience reactions since Shen Yun’s inception in 2006.



A portrait of Leo Tolstoy, 1882, by Nikolai Ge.



At Optina Pustyn, a monastery in the Kaluga region of Russia, Tolstoy spoke with spiritual elders.

HISTORY

Leo Tolstoy’s Search for Meaning

A pilgrimage helped Russia’s great author find spiritual fulfillment

By Leo Salvatore

Torn between his duties and needs, Leo Tolstoy, one of Russia’s greatest authors, abandoned his aristocratic lifestyle. Later in his life, he put on threadbare sandals and set off on a pilgrimage. Its outcome illustrates the intimate link between spiritual fulfillment and simplicity.

Leo Tolstoy: Count, Soldier, Author
Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy—anglicized as Leo Tolstoy—was born in 1828 near Tula, Russia. He traced his ancestry to a legendary man named Indris, who migrated to the Ukraine in the 1300s. Indris converted to Orthodox Christianity, and the faith remained part and parcel of his descendants’ lives.

Tolstoy’s parents died when he was very young, and relatives raised him with their own children. At age 16, he went to Kazan University to study law but was disappointed with the quality of education he received. His teachers thought him unwilling to learn, so he left in the middle of his studies, returned home, and began living the leisurely life of a typical aristocrat.

Leisure ended when he joined the army in 1851. He had recently begun writing, and his firsthand account of the Crimean War of 1853–1856 became a literary success. He wrote several other autobiographical works while a soldier.

Six years later, the now 29-year-old took his first of several trips to Western Europe. Grand-touring was common among young aristocratic intellectuals, including the English poet Lord Byron and German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Tolstoy became particularly interested in pedagogy, which he discussed extensively with the controversial socialist theorist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and other like-minded thinkers.

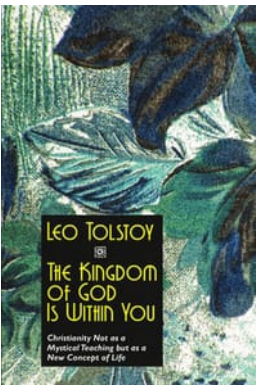
Inspired by the possibility of using his wealth to alleviate poverty, Tolstoy started a network of 13 schools for the children of Russia’s poorest peasants as

soon as he returned home. Suspicious of the count’s political leanings, the Russian imperial police quickly shut down the project. Although it was short-lived, it remains one of the earliest examples of democratic education in modern Europe.

A Crisis at the Height of Fame
During a visit to Paris, Tolstoy witnessed a public execution, something that he would have never imagined on his peaceful private estate. The experience scarred him. To him, the government was meant to protect its people, not kill them on a public stage. If it could do that, Tolstoy thought, it could easily eliminate all citizens. As he later wrote in an essay on patriotism, “A government, therefore, and specially a government entrusted with military power, is the most dangerous organisation possible.”

The following decades were fueled by vigorous reflections on the role of government, the duties of its citizens, and the responsibilities of a wealthy and noble landowner like himself. Tolstoy was a man of extremes, unwilling to find stability in middle grounds. He wondered whether he should continue living as an aristocrat despite the widespread poverty around him, or renounce his affluent lifestyle and retreat in search of a simpler and possibly more fulfilling life.

The turning point came in about 1880. By then, Tolstoy was one of the most celebrated authors alive. His two masterpieces—“War and Peace” and “Anna



Tolstoy shared a vision of a society built on nonviolence, compassion, and spiritual autonomy in this work.

“The Battle of Moscow,” 1822, by Louis-François Lejeune. The Battle of Moscow, fought on Sept. 7, 1812, was a turning point in Napoleon’s failed campaign to defeat Russia. It is vividly depicted in Tolstoy’s “War and Peace.”



Karenina”—had brought him worldwide acclaim. Yet, behind the grandeur of his estate and the brilliance of his prose, the man was unraveling. Eventually, he decided to give away his possessions. He also declared that the public should own his published works. Worried about the financial stability of their 13 children, his wife, Sophia Andreevna Behrs, obtained the copyrights for all of his books published before 1880. Her decision avoided bankruptcy and saved the Tolstoy estate.

In “A Confession,” written during this turbulent period, Tolstoy described his inner turmoil. The book opens with the Eastern fable of the dragon in the well. A man is chased into a well, where a dragon dwells. He clings to a small branch, which two mice are gnawing. The man will eventually fall into the dragon’s mouth. Before falling, he sees a few drops of honey on one of the branch’s leaves. He drinks them and feels content, despite his imminent death. In Tolstoy’s version, however, he no longer enjoys the honey, whose drops represent love for his family and his writing. “I try to suck the honey that once consoled me,” he wrote, “but the honey is no longer sweet.” Death frightened the count, making everything meaningless.

Tolstoy admitted that the path he took to address this existential dilemma was to simply hold on, “despite the absurdity of it.” However, he also realized that life is only hopeless and absurd “without God.” A world with God is a hopeful world, where life continues beyond mortality. But could Tolstoy ever be certain of God’s existence? To placate his doubting mind, the count set off on a life-defining pilgrimage.

Tolstoy’s Pilgrimage

A man with profound sensitivities, Tolstoy had always been interested in religion. However, since he became an atheist in college, his interest had remained passive. As he wrote in “A Confession,” “at the age of eighteen I no longer believed any of the things I had been taught.” He either thought about God intellectually or followed family customs blindly, without ever reaching a self-conscious affirmation of his faith. Evidently, the time for such an affirmation had come.

On June 10, 1880, Tolstoy began walking toward Optina Pustyn, a monastery and well-known pilgrimage destination 33 hours away. To avoid being recognized, he disguised himself as a peasant. Willfully deprived of all the comforts he was used to, he walked for days. He wandered into villages, where he spoke to unassuming farmers, beggars, and other pilgrims who, like him, were seeking to reinvigorate their spiritual lives.

He read the Bible, prayed, and broke bread with fellow human beings who embodied humility and simplicity, two traits he rarely witnessed in the ostentatious halls of his estate. At the monastery, he spoke to “starrets,” spiritual elders with a deep knowledge of the Russian Orthodox tradition, who shared with him firsthand accounts of a truly devotional life.

The pilgrimage wasn’t easy. Tolstoy had little food or water, and he suffered from awful blisters. Yet, as he engaged with ordinary people, the veil of privilege that had always hovered over him finally lifted. Walking had become a spiritual exercise, a way to cultivate discipline through self-imposed affliction. It allowed him to see that people were living meaningful lives despite abject poverty. He observed, “These people spent their lives at hard labor and were less dissatisfied with life than the wealthy.” They endured “sickness and tribulation without question or resistance—peacefully, and in the firm conviction that this is as it should be, cannot be otherwise, and is good,” he wrote. Although life on grand estates was infinitely easier, it completely

On June 10, 1880, Tolstoy began walking toward Optina Pustyn, a monastery and well-known pilgrimage destination.



MAGISTER74/SHUTTERSTOCK



lacked the sense of community that gave people purpose and true contentment.

Faith Renewed

At the end of this experience, Tolstoy came to believe that a religious community could thrive anywhere, with or without the official sanction of an institutional authority and the support of wealthy patrons. He distanced himself from the Russian Orthodox Church, believing that it had strayed too far from the original teachings of Jesus as articulated in the Christian Gospels. Yet he retained a staunch commitment to living a religious life.

Unlike the socialist thinkers he'd met in Western Europe, who denied God, reduced humanity to the body, and downplayed spirituality as a tool for political manipulation, Tolstoy thought that human beings are fundamentally religious, and that any community that seeks long-lasting autonomy must be grounded in a religious ethic. For Tolstoy and Christians like him, that ethic entailed, among other things, communicating with God through prayer and privileging the spirit over the body.

In addition to disavowing organized religion, Tolstoy also vehemently opposed state authority and war. He took to heart the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, and he became a champion of nonviolence. Again, these weren't new commitments. But the pilgrimage gave him the conviction to finally make them integral parts of his private and social life. In "The Kingdom of God is Within You" (1894), Tolstoy shared a vision of a society built on nonviolence, compassion, and spiritual autonomy.

He wrote, "That this social order with its pauperism, famines, prisons, gallows, armies, and wars is necessary to society; that still greater disaster would ensue if this organization were destroyed; all this is said only by those who profit by this organization, while those who suffer from it—and they are ten times as numerous—think and say quite the contrary."

His original combination of Christianity and avant-garde political philosophy made Tolstoy a target of the imperial court and the Russian Orthodox Church, which excommunicated him in 1901. Toward the end of his life, his mental stability faded and his inner turmoil returned. Aged 82, he fled from his home secretly on a cold winter night. He was suffering from ill health, and he died from pneumonia just a day later.

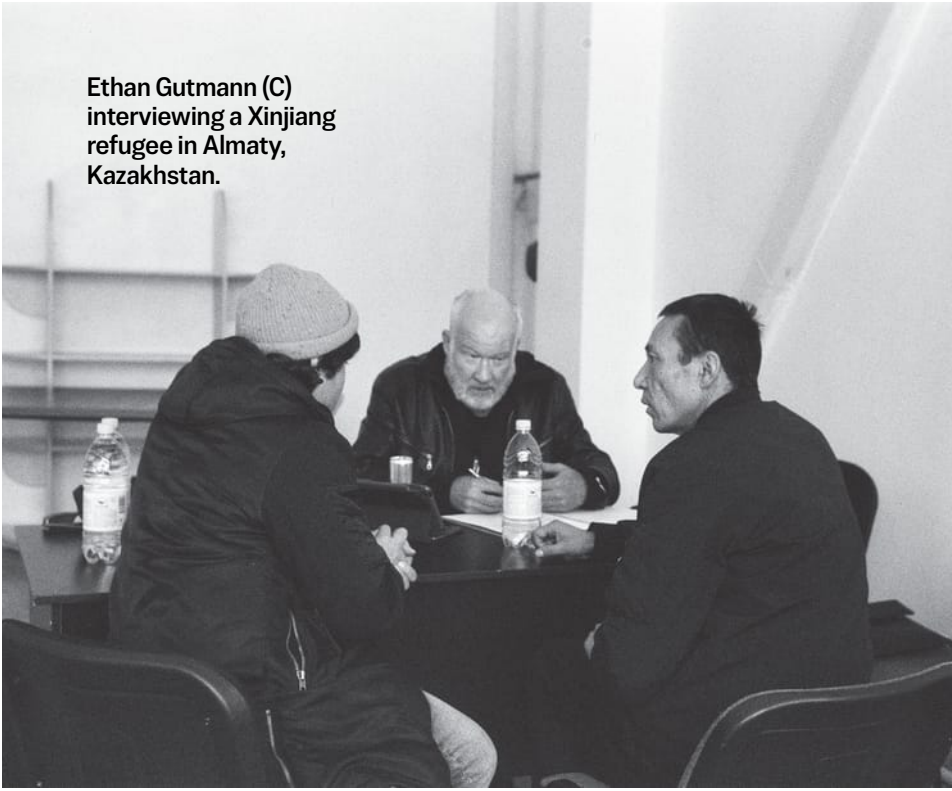
Tolstoy's Reminder

Tolstoy was a Christian, but the value of his story is universal. When faced with a spiritual crisis, the troubled author didn't limit his response to writing or intellectual contemplation. Those were essential, but he also believed that spiritual cultivation must involve active pursuits that involve the entire person: body, mind, and spirit.

During his pilgrimage, he wore threadbare sandals, walked with little food or water, and suffered willfully the hardships such a pilgrimage was bound to bring. He listened to men and women whose faith was simple but whole, unmarred by doubt and unencumbered by aristocratic conventions. Whatever the merits of his theological and philosophical commitments, Tolstoy reminds us that simplicity is often better suited to foster spiritual fulfillment.

Leo Salvatore is an arts and culture writer with a master's degree in classics and philosophy from the University of Chicago and a master's degree in humanities from Ralston College. He aims to inform, delight, and inspire through well-researched essays on history, literature, and philosophy. Contact Leo at leosa383@gmail.com.

JOSEPHINE DE HAAN



Ethan Gutmann (C) interviewing a Xinjiang refugee in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

BOOK REVIEW

Inside China's Organ Harvesting Nightmare

Ethan Gutmann investigated CCP's human rights abuses, in 'The Xingjiang Procedure'

By Phil Hall

Any reader who comes to Ethan Gutmann's "The Xinjiang Procedure" needs to be warned that this book offers a horror scenario more intense and severe than any terror-tinged work by Stephen King. It also provides the most brilliantly researched and intensely described study of a communist regime at war against its population since Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's "The Gulag Archipelago."

Unlike King's novels, "The Xinjiang Procedure" presents a true-life horror story of imprisoned and enslaved people whose bodies are defiled for a lucrative organ-harvesting economy. In the spirit of Solzhenitsyn's towering work, Gutmann details the vile culture of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in its systematic torture and murder of Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region, Tibetans, ethnic Kazakhs, and Christians who worship in unsanctioned "house churches."

The actions described in this book represent a deranged and vile environment unlike anything else happening in today's world. Gutmann first focused on this egregious human rights abuse in his 2014 book "The Slaughter."

In his newest book, he interviews refugees from Xinjiang who provide accounts of their people's suffering at the hands of the regime in their homeland.

Money-Making Machine

The book details how the Chinese live organ-harvesting economy began in the early 1990s. The donors are prisoners from demographic groups that the CCP views as a threat. The organ recipients can pay up to \$700,000 for the transplants.

The Chinese regime operates a lucrative foreign organ "tourism" business. Chinese hospitals, mostly those linked to the military, advertise their services on English- and Arabic-language websites and conduct at least 60,000 transplants annually.

The tragedy of "The Xinjiang Procedure" is realizing that this gruesome activity is not a secret, nor has it been for decades. Gutmann acknowledges how Falun Gong practitioners have been documenting the CCP's actions. He also credits Israel's Dr. Jacob Lavee for highlighting how a killing-on-demand process enables Chinese hospi-

tals to schedule emergency transplants with a wait time of only four hours.

To provide updated information for "The Xinjiang Procedure," Gutmann sought direct input from those who had witnessed these atrocities. But with direct access to Xinjiang blocked by the CCP, Gutmann was forced to find an alternative source of information. He located escapees from Xinjiang amid the ethnic Kazakhs who were fortunate to escape from China into neighboring Kazakhstan.

Gutmann goes into great depth to recall his journey to Kazakhstan and his efforts to locate interview subjects for this book. This becomes a road trip adventure tale, with bizarre encounters and a bafflement in navigating the Kazakh landscape and culture. If the book has a flaw, it would be this section. It dribbles on for too long and distracts from his investigation.

Gutmann then documents the accounts of Xinjiang refugees. They go into harrowing depth on the humiliation and abuses inflicted within the Chinese prison system, as well as by the medical professionals brought in to handle the organ harvesting.

Life in Xinjiang, according to the refugees, had degenerated into a totalitarian hell. A Chinese-born Kazakh refugee named Tursynbek Qabi said: "Every 700 meters, there is a police station with five cars. Xinjiang had become a perfect police state." Other interview subjects discuss the violence forced upon them, ranging from rape (of both women and men in prison) to the crude disposal of harvesting victims' bodies.

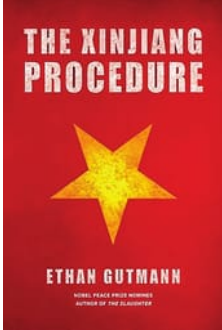
Gutmann also interviews Uyghur refugees from Xinjiang in Tajikistan and Turkey, and their painful experiences add further depth to the investigation.

The Atrocities Continue

Gutmann concludes this extraordinary work by declaring: "There can be no Hollywood ending with such a grim investigation. But it's been the privilege of a lifetime to work with such brave individuals."

The facts and testimonies Gutmann gathers are heartbreaking and disturbing. It is impossible to walk away from the book imagining that the CCP deserves a place among the civilized governments of the world.

"The Xinjiang Procedure" should be required reading for anyone with a conscience and a passion for human rights.



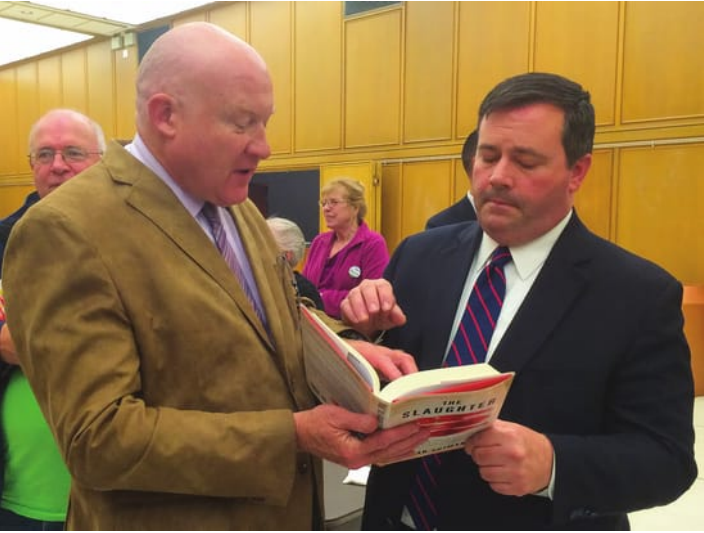
'THE XINJIANG PROCEDURE'

By Ethan Gutmann

Armin Lear Press
March 2, 2026
Paperback
446 pages

The Chinese regime operates a lucrative foreign organ 'tourism' business.

MATTHEW LITTLE/THE EPOCH TIMES



Ethan Gutmann talks about his book "The Slaughter" with Jason Kenney, Canadian minister of employment and social development, on Oct. 20, 2014.

READING

The Last Chapter for Mass Market Paperbacks

The format that once sold millions of copies per week is disappearing because of digital reading and rising production costs

By Walker Larson

Wander into any used bookstore, and you'll encounter shelves bursting with beefy little softcover books. They are a little grimy, printed on thin, brownish paper, with small type crammed onto the narrow pages. Many of the original 1970s and 1980s action-packed covers are now faded and dated. These are the mass market paperbacks that once littered the shelves near the checkouts at grocery stores, a literary format intended to make countless titles available to Americans at a low cost. They are a dying breed, a neglected remnant of a bygone cultural moment.

At the end of 2025, ReaderLink, one of the largest paperback distributors, closed the book on mass market paperbacks. They're discontinuing the format. The decision marks the closing of an age and one more step away from widespread cultural literacy.

"The mass market paperback—once the single most popular reading format in the world—has been dying for over a quarter-century," novelist Steve Womack wrote. "ReaderLink's decision is, to fall back on a perfectly valid cliché, the final nail in the coffin. An eighty-six-year-long ride is over."

Paperback Origins

The mass market paperback emerged out of the lean days of the Great Depression, when people couldn't afford luxuries, and book publishers were desperate to sell more books, leading them to invent a cheap and easily produced book format (the 4.25-inch by 6.87-inch softcover). But the heyday of



IRINA MAGRELO/SHUTTERSTOCK

mass market paperbacks was roughly from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s, and it's the era that launched the careers of many pop American writers, such as Louis L'Amour, Stephen King, and Kurt Vonnegut.

Mass market paperbacks are a symbol of a distinctive era of literary history: the post-war years of economic growth. Prior to the advent of digital entertainment, a high demand for books led to slews of novels tumbling off the press and into drugstores, gas stations, and airports. There were some quality titles and plenty of trashy ones, the heirs of the pulp fiction of the 1910s to the 1950s. These editions often outsold their more expensive hardcover counterparts and helped create the "midlist." This group of authors weren't successful enough to make it in hardcover but sold enough softcovers to make a living for themselves and some profit for their publishers.

Sales Trends

According to Publishers Weekly, Jacqueline Susann's 1966 novel "Valley of the Dolls" sold a respectable 300,000 hardcovers in its first year—but when Bantam released the mass market paperback in 1967, it sold 4 million copies in a week. The mass market edition of "Jaws" sold 11 million copies in six months. Cheap paperbacks were a market all their own.

But that market has steadily dried up, beginning with the disappearance of smaller

independent booksellers and distributors in the late 1990s. As Womack explained, a wave of acquisitions, bankruptcies, and changes in tax laws destroyed that ecosystem.

"While companies were either being acquired or working their way through bankruptcy courts, hundreds of thousands of mass market paperbacks sat gathering dust, cheap paper fading to yellow, in hundreds of warehouses across the country," he wrote.

Publishers Weekly reports that the tide began to turn in 1996: Mass market sales fell by 3.3 percent that year. Not long after independent distributors were gobbled up or closing their doors, the ebook emerged on the scene, introducing a strong competitor in the realm of affordable reading. In 2011, ebook and mass market paperbacks still held even at about \$1.1 billion in sales each, but ebooks were a rising star. The next year, mass market paperbacks fell by \$500 million in sales, while ebooks skyrocketed by another \$1 billion. The downward trend of the physical format has continued, and rising production costs, coupled with publishers' reluctance to raise prices, have made the format unsustainable.

"It seems the consumer has spoken," said Steve Zacharius, CEO of Kensington Publishing, one of the leading mass market publishers in the United States.

"Year after year, unit sales have steadily declined. It's puzzling in some ways: with all the concerns around affordability, you

◀ These small, inexpensive books were the lifeline for midlist authors, giving readers more options and keeping writers in business.

might expect readers to gravitate toward a lower-cost option. But that hasn't been the case with books, at least not in print."

Digital Over Physical?

While trade paperbacks—larger, higher-quality softcovers—continue to sell, it looks like the days of mass market paperbacks have ended. To some, such as longtime publishing insider Esther Margolis, that's a tragedy. In an NPR interview, she said:

"People who grew up only knowing schoolbooks and realizing that they could actually get entertained and informed by these little paperbacks, you could pick them up at the schoolbook fair. You could pick them up at a local gas station. You can't really do that today. I'm very sad about it."

Physical, brand-new books are now less accessible as a result. Whether the grocery store racks gave access to much quality literature is another question, but their disappearance speaks to a larger trend: the gradual erosion of reading and the growing preference for the digital over the physical.

We're entering what some have termed a "post-literate society," a world where people no longer read books, turning instead to the more stimulating and sensationalist digital realm of videos, social media, podcasts, and blogs. This digital information consumption encourages different thought patterns, interests, and mindsets compared to its print predecessor. Whether this change in how we consume and reflect on information and entertainment will ultimately be to our benefit or our loss remains to be seen. Does the demise of the mass market paperback signify the death of something deeper in our culture? Time will tell.

Before becoming a freelance journalist and culture writer, Walker Larson taught literature and history at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife and daughter. He holds a master's in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in The Hemingway Review, Intellectual Takeout, and his Substack, The Hazelnut. He is also the author of two novels, "Hologram" and "Song of Spheres."

DEAR NEXT GENERATION Advice from our readers to our young people

Discuss Life Before You Marry

Discussing every eventuality before the wedding day will help the couple weather any unexpected setbacks with grace

I am 76 years old and would like to share a wee bit of the wisdom I have gained over the years. My husband and I are the parents of four children, the grandparents of nine grandchildren, and the great-grandparents of five (and counting?) great-grandchildren. Only, this happy accounting didn't come without some struggles.

I had just turned 18 years of age and just graduated from high school when I had to have surgery for the removal of an ovarian tumor. There was no cancer involved, so I went about my merry way. After nursing school and working in a hospital, I met HIM! I knew it from the moment I saw him. I was 22. He was 23 and had put the horror of the Vietnam War behind him. We wasted no



ORGANIC MEDIA/GETTY IMAGES

▲ Family isn't defined by blood, but by commitment and love.

time—we were engaged in January and married in May 1972. We discussed everything about married life and having a family. We both wanted more than two children. I told him about my surgery at 18 and suggested that the road to pregnancy may not be easy. The decision to pursue adoption was just natural to both of us. So when we found ourselves childless on our first wedding anniversary, we contacted an adoption agency.

I wish I could say the rest was easy, but I can't. It was 1973—the year Roe v. Wade was

decided. We didn't get to bring our first baby home until 1975, and we adopted the second in 1977. Then—as far as adoption agencies were concerned—we were done; our family was complete. No more babies were available to us. Abortion on demand had limited our options. So we turned to overseas adoptions. Baby No. 3 came home in 1980, and baby No. 4 came home in 1982 from South Korea. Then we knew our family was complete.

But it was during this long labor of love that I gained the wisdom of which I speak:

1. Discuss your options for having a family before you marry. I am so glad we did. What will you do if you find yourselves to be an infertile couple? Discuss this in depth.
2. Know that the answer to No. 1 can have explosive answers. I learned that some men will not accept any child that is not their own seed. I must admit, that was a hard concept for me to entertain. It was this lesson that taught me I had married a gem of a man. He married me for me. If we could not have our own biological children, we would have a family anyway—we would adopt.
3. I also learned that some people believe that they wouldn't be able to love an adopted child as their own. What?!? To my husband

and me, a child is a child is a child. God gave our children to us and allowed us to love and care for them. What more could you ask for?

4. Some couples choose not to have children. This is a foreign concept to me, but personal choice is just that, right? Why bring a child into a home where he is not wanted?

I had to learn to give people the space to make their own decisions and not judge them. What God had given me and my husband was a gift. Pure and simple. Thank you, Lord.

Discuss LIFE before you marry. It will make your marriage stronger.

—Christine Harn Kruckek

What advice would you like to give to the younger generations? We call on all of our readers to share the timeless values that define right and wrong, and pass the torch, if you will, through your wisdom and hard-earned experience. We feel that the passing down of this wisdom has diminished over time, and that only with a strong moral foundation can future generations thrive. Send your advice, along with your full name, state, and contact information to NextGeneration@epochtimes.com or mail it to: **Next Generation, The Epoch Times, 129 W. 29th St., Floor 8, New York, NY 10001**

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THE EPOCH TIMES



MARCH 4–10, 2026

FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES



The Lamb

By William Blake

Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice!
Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child:
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb God bless thee.
Little Lamb God bless thee.



CAVAN-IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK



WHY CAN'T BABY LEOPARDS WIN AT HIDE-AND-SEEK?

THEY'RE ALWAYS SPOTTED.

ERIC ISSELEE/SHUTTERSTOCK

“Everyone needs time to develop their dreams. An egg in the nest doesn't become a bird overnight.”

LOIS EHLERT (1934–2021),
AMERICAN AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

AN ANIMAL ARTIST

When Francisco Bayeu was born on March 9, 1734, nobody could have guessed that one day he would be Spain's leading court painter. Throughout his career, he painted huge frescoes in cathedrals and royal palaces, decorating domes and walls with angels, shepherds, and other bright religious scenes. But Bayeu also loved studying animals, and he practiced drawing them so that he could add them to his frescoes. His animal collection includes everything from sketches of oxen and sheep to a well-known oil painting called “Study of a Dog from Life,” which he painted around 1783. It depicts a dozing, mixed-breed hunting dog and is considered an exceptional animal portrait for the era.

▶ A 1792 self-portrait of Francisco Bayeu.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

By Aidan Danza

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

LIFE AS A DUCKLING

Many birds spend their childhood in a nest, letting their bodies develop over time before they have the flight feathers to fledge and become adults. But not ducks.

Ducklings will leave their nest, along with all their siblings and their mother, at the age of one or two days old. However, each species of duck grows up just a little differently.

MALLARD

Mallards are one of the most common ducks in the United States, and their breeding process is fairly similar to that of many other ducks. The female makes a nest on dry land with quick access to water; lines it with grass and feathers; lays eight to 13 eggs; and incubates the eggs for about a month.

All the ducklings hatch at once, and are given a day to recuperate

from the strenuous hatching process. Then, their mother leads them to a pond or wetland, and teaches them to eat invertebrates on the water's surface.

After that, the ducklings basically live a supervised independent life. They find their own food, but their mother warns them of predators and leads them to the best food sources. Then, after 45 to 60 days, they become completely independent.

WOOD DUCK

Mallards have considerable success nesting on ponds or river banks, but there's a problem: Predators have easy access to such a nest. Wood ducks solve that problem by nesting high in a tree, sometimes as high as 60 feet off the ground. However, when the eggs hatch, wood duck parents soon have a new problem: The ducklings are very high ff the ground in their nest.

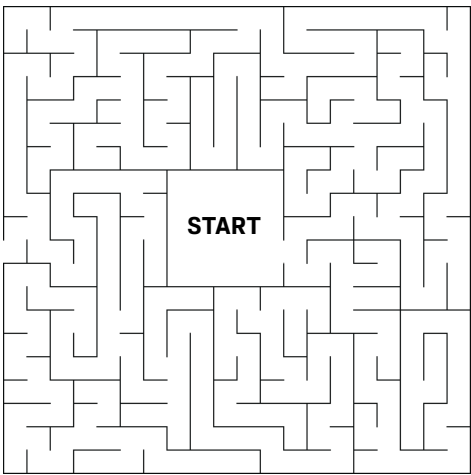
Amazingly, undaunted by their predicament, the ducklings take a leap of faith and hurl themselves out of their tree. You would think this would be instant death for such a tiny duckling, but they are so light and fluffy that their surface area acts

like a parachute, allowing them to safely flutter down into leaf litter.

After that, their process of development is similar to that of most other ducks, but it can definitely be said that they get a unique start to life.

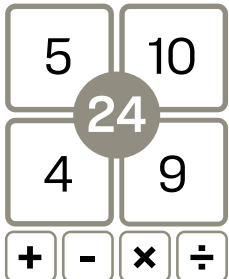


AMAZING LABYRINTH



USE THE FOUR NUMBERS IN THE CORNERS, AND THE OPERATORS (+, -, / AND X) to build an equation to get the solution in the middle. There may be more than one “unique” solution but, there may also be “equivalent” solutions. For example: 6 + (7 X 3) + 1 = 28 and 1+ (7 X 3) + 6 = 28

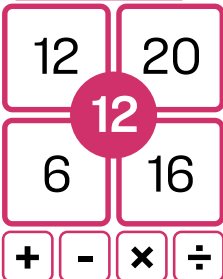
Easy puzzle 1



Solution for Easy 1

4 × (6 - 5 + 0) (10)
(5 - 6) × (9 - 0) (10)

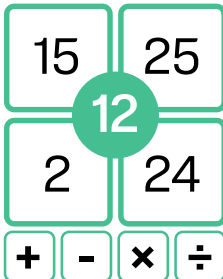
Medium Puzzle 1



Solution for Medium 1

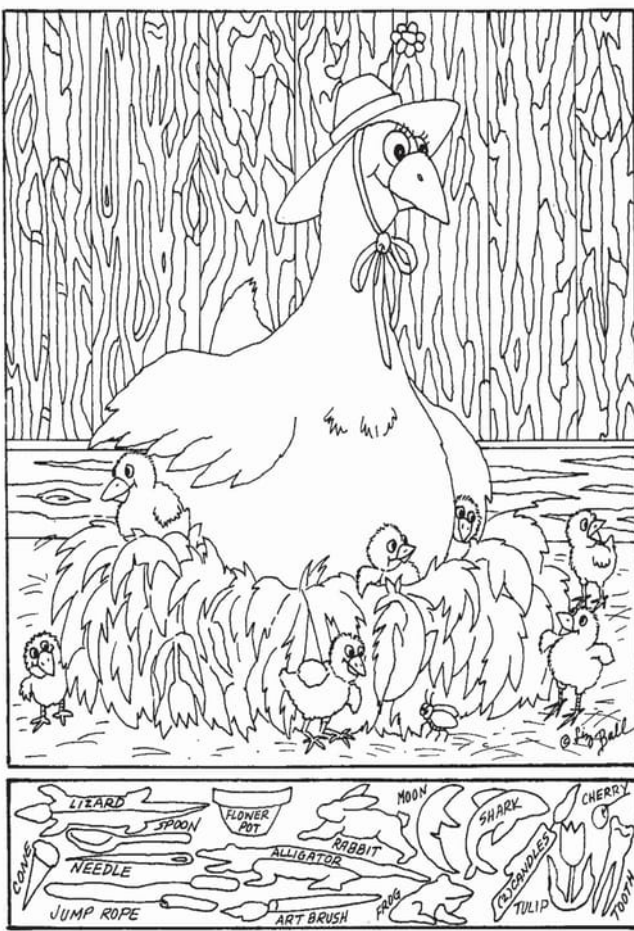
(20 - 16) × 6 - 12

Hard Puzzle 1



Solution for Hard 1

24 + 15 - 25 - 2

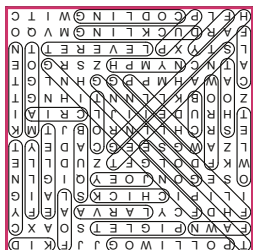


Hidden Treasures by Liz Ball
www.HiddenPicturePuzzles.com

WORDSEARCH: Baby Animals!

T P O L L I W O G J J F K I D
F A W N P I G L E T S O A X C
F H D F C Y L A R V A A E F Y
I L I P I C H I C K S L A I G
O S E G O N J O E Y Q I G L N
W K F D O L G F T Z U D L L E
L Z A W G S E E G C A D E Y T
E S R C H L L N R O B J T M K
T H R U D E I I J L C R I A I
Z O O B K L L N N T I H N G T
C A W A H M P P G G H N L G T
A T N C N Y M P H Z S R G O E
L S T Y X P L E V E R E T T N
F A R D U C K L I N G M V Q O
H F L P C O D L I N G W I T C

Calf Foal
Chick Fry
Codling Gosling
Colt Hatchling
Cria Joey
Cub Kid
Cygnet Kitten
Duckling Larva
Eaglet Leveret
Farrow Maggot
Fawn Nymph
Filly Owlet
Fingerling Piglet
Fledgling Polliwig



Pup
Shoat
Snakelet
Squab
Tadpole
Whelp

LARGER THAN LIFE: ARCHITECTURE THROUGH THE AGES

By Sarah Isak-Goode

Gardens and Grandeur: Georgia's Hills and Dales Estate

An Italian Renaissance
villa-style estate in the
Georgian Piedmont foothills

Rising gracefully across 35 acres of verdant rolling hills and shaded ravines, the historic Hills and Dales Estate began in 1832 as a small formal garden first planted by Nancy Coleman Ferrell. Her daughter, Sarah, expanded it in 1841, transforming the site into the renowned Ferrell Gardens.

The distinctive stone terraces and retaining walls were constructed prior to the Civil War by enslaved laborers. By 1888, the grounds burst with color and fragrance, featuring an impressive collection of rare plants and trees: the creamy white blooms of calla lilies, the delicate purple of nun's orchids, the glossy green of magnolias, and the soft scents of banana shrubs all mingling with the earthy aroma of Japanese cedars, weeping cypresses, and rhododendrons. Following Sarah's death at age 86 in 1903, textile industrialist Fuller E. Callaway and his wife, Ida, purchased the property.

In the early 20th century, the estate entered a new chapter under the stewardship of the Callaway family. They changed the name from Ferrell Gardens to Hills and Dales because, as Ida put it, "If anyone asks us why we named it Hills and Dales, we take

them on an automobile ride through the farm, over sunny hills and through shady dales.” The Callaways commissioned architects Neel Reid and Hal Hentz to design a 13,000-square-foot residence that would complement the historic 19th-century Ferrell Gardens—reversing the typical pattern in which gardens are added after the house.

Completed in 1916, the home exemplifies Classical Revival architecture filtered through the Italian Renaissance villa tradition. Constructed of stucco and brick and capped with a red tile roof, the house features a monumental semicircular portico supported by Ionic columns.

The interior encompasses approximately 30 rooms across three floors, including formal reception spaces, a grand stair hall, a palm room enriched with Greco-Roman motifs, and multiple bedroom suites with fireplaces. Italian artisans originally commissioned at Hills and Dales to construct the home's masonry walls later shifted their focus to intricate plasterwork. They fashioned delicate ornamentation in floral, avian, and human motifs. The third floor features a recreation room reportedly modeled on an English pub, complete with a billiards table and ivory billiard balls. Each detail reinforces

es disciplined classicism and material refinement.

Fuller resided at Hills and Dales until his death in 1928. Under the stewardship of a second generation, including Fuller E. Callaway Jr. and Alice Hand Callaway, the gardens were periodically opened to the public. In 1998, the estate was bequeathed to the Fuller E. Callaway Foundation with the intention that it remain accessible as a public resource. A visitor center opened in 2004, and subsequent restoration allowed the upper floors to welcome visitors in 2010.

Today, Hills and Dales operates as a house and garden museum, preserved as a landmark of Southern design. It is widely regarded as one of the best-preserved 19th-century gardens in the United States. It stands as a synthesis of antebellum garden planning and early 20th-century Classical Revival architecture, offering a sustained dialogue between landscape and built form that continues to shape and represent regional identity.

Sarah Isak-Goode is a writer residing in the Pacific Northwest. She is passionate about representing the human experience, no matter the subject. When not writing, she enjoys painting, reading historical texts, and hiking with her dog, Thor.

**The home exemplifies
Classical Revival
architecture filtered
through the Italian
Renaissance villa tradition.**

▲ The home's grand portico, or covered entryway, is covered by a semicircular terracotta roof. It is supported by six columns—an architectural element that originates from ancient Greek temples and has been widely used in classical architecture.

▲ Rich walnut paneling and millwork frame the living room's interior, consistent with the refined materials used throughout the estate. A velvet sofa commissioned by Alice Callaway anchors the room. Its distinctive curved form replicates the stone bench where she and Fuller sat during their courtship.

▲ An elaborately decorated coffered ceiling crowns the dining room, while a substantial stone fireplace serves as its focal point. Much of the original furniture and decorative arts remain, including a walnut refectory table, hand-wrought andirons, a polychrome replica of Donatello's St. George, and a studio copy of Raphael's "Madonna and Child."

▲ Originally conceived as a parlor, the music room features expansive windows that admit abundant natural light and establish a visual dialogue with the surrounding grounds. A crystal chandelier, once enjoyed by the Callaway family, remains suspended above the space, illuminating the room arranged for an intimate gathering by the piano.

▲ Installed in 1960, the herb garden pergola forms part of the formal south garden complex. The structure shelters an array of culinary, medicinal, and aromatic herbs. Four rose pillars planted with antique climbing varieties commemorate the earlier rose garden. Pathways bordered by planted beds link the pergola to adjacent features, including the greenhouse and fountains.

The palm room is a narrow, light-filled gallery with vaulted ceilings and classical detailing, including low marble wainscoting. The space visually and physically integrates interior architecture with the formal garden. A Greco-Roman-inspired dining table rests on four painted bases with winged sphinxes and lion's paw feet.

◀ **Expansive garden**
plots of zinnias, grapes,
and magnolias stretch
toward the greenhouse
at upper right, where
calla lilies have
bloomed continuously
since 1916. A long
axial path intersects
the grand entrance
and courtyard, then
extends past the
bathhouse, pool
terrace, Alice's "Ray
Garden" with its
Greek statue, the
herb garden, and the
workhouse.

ALL PHOTOS BY GOLDEN BELL PHOTOGRAPHY/HILLS & DALES ESTATE UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

PREPAREDNESS

After finding his home in flames, one man had to rebuild everything. **D4**

ASK THE VET

A simple test helps veterinarians identify heart disease in cats. **D8**

Home

THE EPOCH TIMES

D1 MARCH 4-10, 2026

SHUGMC/SHUTTERSTOCK



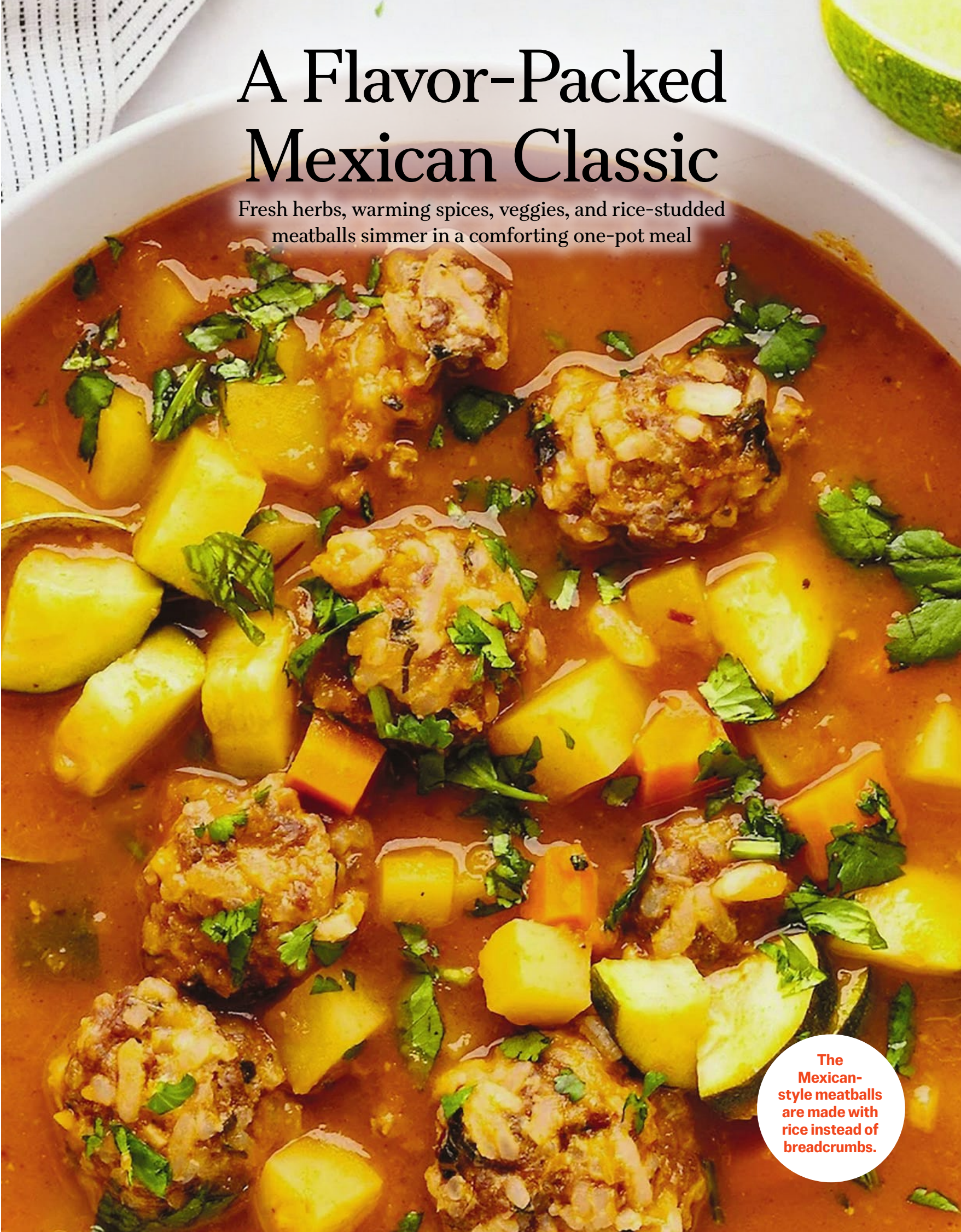
COFFEE

It takes only a few minutes and pantry items to clean a Keurig. **D7**

JENNIFER SEGAL

A Flavor-Packed Mexican Classic

Fresh herbs, warming spices, veggies, and rice-studded meatballs simmer in a comforting one-pot meal



The Mexican-style meatballs are made with rice instead of breadcrumbs.

Vegetables add sweetness and heartiness, making the soup a complete meal.

By Jennifer Segal

This traditional Mexican albóndigas soup features tender meatballs simmered in a lightly spicy, tomato-rich broth with plenty of vegetables. It reminds me a bit of Italian wedding soup, with its mix of meatballs, broth, and veggies, but the smoky depth from chiles and tomatoes gives it a personality all its own. The little meatballs are made in the

traditional Mexican style, with rice mixed into the meat instead of breadcrumbs. It keeps them tender and light and gives them their signature texture. Albóndigas soup is plenty satisfying on its own, especially with some warm bread or cornbread on the side—and it tastes even better the next day.

What You'll Need

FRESH MINT, GARLIC, OREGANO, AND CUMIN: These aromatics and seasonings provide

a fresh and earthy flavor base for the meatballs and broth.

MEATLOAF MIX: A mix of beef and pork (and sometimes veal) that makes a flavorful base for meatballs. All beef or all pork may be used instead.

COOKED LONG-GRAIN WHITERICE: Gives the meatballs a wonderful fork-tender texture.

WHOLE PEELED TOMATOES, CHIPOTLE PEPPERS IN ADOBO, AND CHICKEN BROTH: Form the vibrant, smoky base of the soup. *Continued on D2*

No-Fuss, No-Frying Buffalo Cauliflower

Hot sauce clings to caramelized cauliflower florets, creating a spicy, satisfying dish that works as a snack, side, or main attraction

By Grace Elkus & Jan Valdez

I'm pretty much a fan of any spicy condiment, so I love Buffalo sauce in all its tangy, buttery glory. I'm also a vegetarian—so no Buffalo wings for me. But who cares! Wings are just the gateway into Buffalo sauce; once you've joined the fan club, there are plenty of other (and arguably better) ways to enjoy it. These buffalo cauliflower bites are my latest

obsession, and I guarantee they're the best around. Here's how to make them.

Why You'll Love It

You only need three key ingredients (not counting olive oil, salt, and pepper), and they can be easily prepared. Simply roast the cauliflower florets at 475 degrees F until crisp, then toss them with hot sauce. Easy and delicious. After countless tests, *Continued on D2*

JOE LINGEMAN/TCA



Crispy, spicy cauliflower bites are great eaten as is or stuffed into a taco.

Mexican Meatball Soup

Light and tender meatballs create the dish’s signature texture

Continued from D1

CARROTS, RUSSET POTATOES, AND ZUCCHINI: These vegetables add sweetness and heartiness, making the soup a complete meal—just be sure to add the zucchini at the end so it stays tender-crisp.

Jennifer Segal is a classically trained chef, cookbook author, and busy mom. She became interested in cooking in college while studying abroad in France and living with a French family. She is a graduate of L’Academie de Cuisine. This article was originally published on OnceUponaChef.com.

ALBONDIGAS SOUP

SERVES 6

FOR THE MEATBALLS

- 1 egg
- 3 tablespoons fresh chopped mint (or cilantro)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 pound meatloaf mix (or half 80 percent lean ground beef/half ground pork—or all of one or the other)
- 1 1/4 cups (packed) cooked long-grain white rice (see note)

FOR THE BROTH

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 (28-ounce) can of whole peeled tomatoes with their juices
- 2 to 3 whole chipotle peppers in adobo sauce, depending on size and how much heat you like
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 2 carrots, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 2 small russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces (should be 2 cups)
- 1 large zucchini, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1/4 cup fresh chopped cilantro, for serving
- Lime wedges, for serving

MAKE THE MEATBALLS

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C) and set an oven rack in the middle position. Line a baking sheet with

It reminds me a bit of Italian wedding soup, with its mix of meatballs, broth, and veggies, but the smoky depth from chiles and tomatoes gives it a personality all its own.



Key Steps



aluminum foil and set an oven-safe roasting rack on top. Spray the rack generously with nonstick cooking spray.

In a large bowl, beat the egg with the mint, garlic, oregano, cumin, and salt. Add the meatloaf mix and cooked rice, and mash with your hands until evenly combined.

Wet your hands and roll the mixture into tablespoon-size balls, about 1 inch (2.5 centimeters) in diameter—you should have about 32 meatballs. Arrange them on the prepared rack, re-wetting your hands as needed to prevent sticking. Bake for 15 minutes, until lightly browned and almost cooked through; they’ll finish cooking in the broth. Set aside.

MAKE THE SOUP

In a large (at least 5 1/2 quarts/5 liters) Dutch oven or soup pot over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook 1 minute more, stirring constantly; do not brown.

Add the tomatoes (crushing them with your hands as you add them), chipotle peppers, chicken broth, salt, cumin, and oregano. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, for 10 minutes. Using an immersion blender, blend until the broth is smooth. (If you don’t have an immersion blender, carefully transfer the soup to a blender in batches, remove the center

cap from the lid, and cover with a kitchen towel to let steam escape. Blend until smooth, then return it to the pot.)

Add the carrots and potatoes and bring the soup back to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, for about 20 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender.

Add the zucchini and the meatballs, leaving any excess fat behind on the rack (you can gently scrape them if needed). Simmer for 5 to 8 minutes, until the zucchini is tender and the meatballs are cooked through. Taste and adjust seasoning as needed.

Ladle the soup into bowls, sprinkle with fresh cilantro, and serve with lime wedges.

No-Fuss, No-Frying Buffalo Cauliflower

Continued from D1

I consider these to be a wild success. They’re easier, healthier, and more delicious than any other recipes I’ve tried. Plus, they satisfy my Buffalo sauce cravings.

Key Ingredients

CAULIFLOWER: Cut a medium head of cauliflower into large florets (about 8 cups). **GARLIC POWDER:** Season with garlic powder, coating the florets evenly. **HOT SAUCE:** Although the brand you

use is entirely up to you (Frank’s, Texas Pete, Sriracha, Cholula—the list goes on), Frank’s RedHot has that classic Buffalo wing flavor. It’s what I use in every Buffalo sauce recipe, and it’s never let me down.

Ways to Use Buffalo Cauliflower Bites

Buffalo cauliflower tacos: Divide the cauliflower bites among charred corn tortillas. Top with sliced radishes, fresh cilantro leaves and tender stems, and crumbled cotija or feta cheese. Pour any extra sauce from the baking sheet onto the tacos for maximum juiciness.

Buffalo cauliflower bowls: Make this hearty vegetarian grain bowl packed with spicy roasted cauliflower, avocado, and a simple green tahini sauce.

Buffalo cauliflower lettuce wraps: Roasted cauliflower florets are doused in buffalo wing sauce and wrapped up in crunchy lettuce leaves for a vegetarian take on chicken lettuce wraps.

I Didn’t Invent Buffalo Cauliflower—I Just Made It Better

A quick Pinterest search will reveal there’s been more than a few iterations on Buffalo cauliflower bites. Many are designed to mimic restaurant-style Buffalo chicken wings, meaning that the florets are dredged in beaten egg, dipped in flour or panko, and then baked or fried. Not only did I find this messy, but the bites also turned out more gummy than crisp, and the cauliflower itself got lost.

So I considered my priorities. I wanted these bites to be as easy as possible (ideally just three ingredients, not counting olive oil, salt, and pepper), as healthy as possible (oven-baked rather than fried and made with olive oil in place of butter), and as crispy as possible (crank up that oven temperature). They should be delicious as a side dish, just as great for feeding friends as an appetizer, and even better stuffed into corn tortillas for taco night.

The solution? Coating large florets in olive oil and seasoning with plenty of salt, pepper, and garlic powder (don’t be shy—cauliflower itself doesn’t have a ton of flavor, so a heavy hand is a must), roasting at 475 degrees F on the lowest oven rack until beginning to crisp, tossing with the hot sauce so that every piece is coated, and returning to the oven until the sauce is warm and the veg is extra-crisp.

Make-ahead and Storage Tips

Make ahead: The cauliflower can be cut into florets up to 3 days ahead and refrigerated.

Storage: Leftovers can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 4 days.

Grace Elkus and Jan Valdez are contributors to TheKitchn.com, a nationally known blog for people who love food and home cooking. Submit any comments or questions to editorial@thekitchn.com. Copyright 2026 Apartment Therapy. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

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◀ Albondigas soup brings together tender meatballs, fresh veggies, and a spicy broth in a nourishing one-pot meal that freezes beautifully, too.

1. In a large bowl, beat the egg with the mint, garlic, oregano, cumin, and salt.
2. Add the meatloaf mix and cooked rice, then mash with your hands until evenly combined.
3. With wet hands, roll the mixture into 1-inch balls. Bake on roasting rack until lightly browned.
4. Sauté the onion until softened, then stir in the garlic and cook for a minute more.
5. Boil and blend the hand-crushed tomatoes, chipotle peppers, chicken broth, salt, cumin, and oregano.
6. Stir in the carrots and potatoes, then simmer uncovered until the vegetables are tender.
7. Add the zucchini and the meatballs, simmering until cooked. Serve with fresh cilantro and lime wedges.



Notes
I use Veetee microwave basmati rice (the heat-and-eat variety that microwaves for 2 minutes) for convenience—it works beautifully and saves time. You can also use leftover rice or another brand of microwave long-grain white rice; just avoid parboiled/converted rice (such as Uncle Ben's/Ben's Original or other parboiled varieties), which stays too firm. Heat-and-eat microwave rice does not need to be microwaved before using.

Make-Ahead/Freezing Instructions: You can prepare the meatballs up to a day in advance and refrigerate them, or bake them and refrigerate for up to 2 days before finishing the soup. The full soup can

be made up to 2 days ahead, cooled, and refrigerated in an airtight container; reheat gently on the stovetop before serving. For longer storage, freeze the soup (with the meatballs and vegetables) for up to 3 months. Let it cool completely, then freeze in freezer-safe containers, leaving a little space at the top for expansion. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator and reheat on the stovetop. Add fresh cilantro and lime just before serving.

NUTRITION INFORMATION
Per serving (6 servings) Calories: 501 kcal, Carbohydrates: 43 grams, Protein: 27 g, Fat: 25 g, Saturated Fat: 3 g, Cholesterol: 43 milligrams, Sodium: 1,601 mg, Fiber: 7 g, Sugar: 16 g

 BUFFALO CAULIFLOWER BITES

SERVES 4
1 medium head of cauliflower (about 2 pounds), cut into large florets (about 8 cups)
4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
2 teaspoons garlic powder
1 teaspoon kosher salt



▲ Cauliflower florets become delightfully crispy and caramelized when roasted.

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/3 cup hot sauce, such as Frank's RedHot

Arrange an oven rack in the lowest position, and heat to 475 degrees F. Place cauliflower florets on a rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with 3 tablespoons of the olive oil and toss to combine. Sprinkle with garlic powder, kosher salt, and freshly ground black pepper, and toss until thoroughly seasoned. Arrange in an even layer.

Roast until golden-brown and beginning to crisp, about 15 minutes. Meanwhile, whisk hot sauce and remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil together in a small bowl or liquid measuring cup.

Remove the cauliflower from the oven. Pour the hot sauce mixture over the cauliflower, and use a spatula to toss until the florets are evenly coated. Return to the oven and roast until crispy, 5 to 10 minutes more. The bites are best eaten immediately.

HERE'S HOW

The Practical Appeal of Retractable Screens

Retractable screens block the sun when unfurled and neatly retract when not in use

By James Dulley

Q Dear James: It is a hassle putting up and taking down window screens. Do retractable window screens block bugs as well, and are there larger ones to replace screen doors?

—Brooke H.

A Dear Brooke: When you don't need fresh air ventilation during winter and want a clear outdoor view, having no window screens is good. Screening actually blocks more of the view and light than most people realize. Some of the durable fiberglass screens can block as much as 30 percent of the view.

During the summer, when you are running your air conditioner, the shading effect from the screens can be welcomed. If your screens are indoors, as on casement windows, much of the glare will be reduced. If your screens are outdoors, as on other types of windows, the screens will also block some of the sun's heat.

Retractable screens would be an excellent and attractive option for your windows. When they are retracted, the screen totally disappears. When you want screens, you just pull them out, and you have window screens in about five seconds. Since they will be retracted much of the time, they will not need much cleaning.

The retractable screen kits made for windows have a narrow housing into which the screen retracts. This housing is mounted at the top of the window opening, so it is often totally hidden by the curtains or valance.

The housing is spring-loaded, so the screen rolls into it quickly. The spring also keeps the proper tension on the screen when it is opened over the window. The exposed edge of the screen has some type of mechanical or magnetic latch to hold it open over the window. The sides of the screen slide in tracks so no insects can get indoors.

Retractable screen kits are also available for doors, especially sliding glass patio doors on which a clear view is desirable. When installed on

doors, the housing is mounted vertically on the side of the door opening. You may be able to find retractable screen kits for windows and doors at your local home center store. If not, try contacting some of these manufacturers for local sources: Eclipse Technologies (877-532-5477), Mirage/Alco Ventures (800-667-2526), and Tri-State Retractable Screens (888-742-6866).

It is a fairly easy do-it-yourself project to install a retractable screen kit on either a window or a door. The kit includes every part, even the fasteners, you will need to install the retractable screen.

For window installation, mount the housing on the top of the window opening. If your window opening is considerably out of square, you can flush mount a retractable screen kit on the wall over the window opening. This will require a slightly wider kit. Install the side tracks per the instructions, and the job is complete.

It is a fairly easy do-it-yourself project to install a retractable screen kit on either a window or a door.

For hinged door installation, the housing and pull rail are normally mounted on the same side as the hinges. For sliding glass patio doors, the housing is usually mounted at the end of the fixed glass panel. Since the kits used on doors are large, it is critical that the housing be mounted perfectly vertically. Special shims are available if the door opening jamb is not vertical.

—James

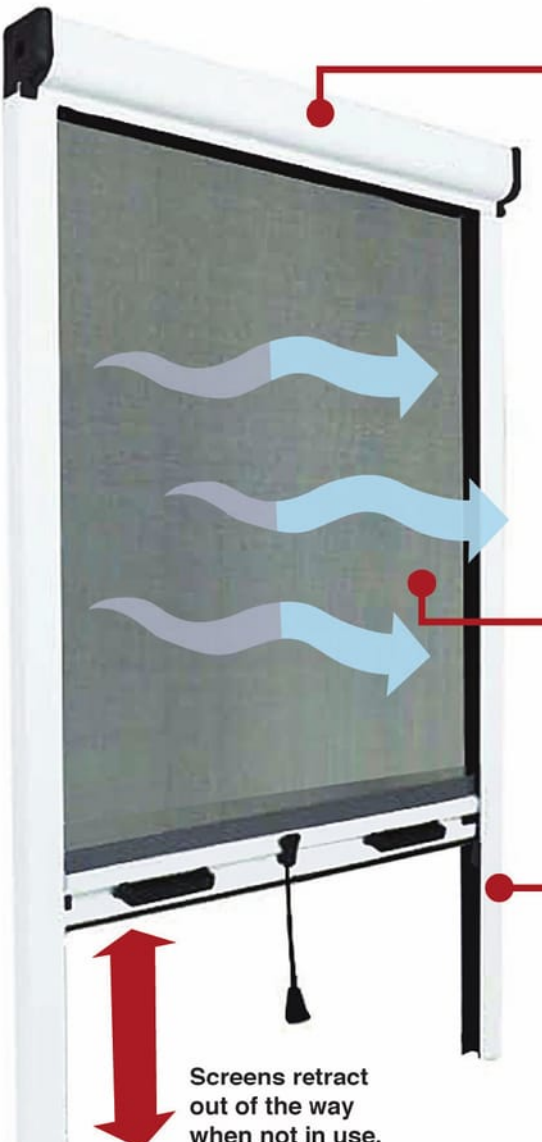
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HOME

Do-it-Yourself

Retractable Screen

A retractable screen offers all the benefits of a traditional panel screen and more. It keeps insects out and facilitates fresh airflow, but it also disappears when not in use.



INSTALLATION
Mount the housing in the top of the window opening. The housing is spring-loaded so the screen rolls into it quickly. The spring also keeps the proper tension on the screen when it is opened over the window.

PASS-THROUGH
Retractable screens allow the cross ventilation of a cool breeze without allowing flies and other insects in.

SEAL
The sides of the screen slide in tracks so there is no gap.

Screens retract out of the way when not in use.

Creators.com Bob Kast



A GREENER VIEW

2026 Green Thumb Awards

Winners included a a disease-resistant tomato, a tabletop aquarium, and a whole host of beautiful flowers

By Jeff Rugg

The Green Thumb awards are sponsored by the National Garden Bureau, a nonprofit organization that exists to educate and inspire home gardeners. The winning products were selected based on their uniqueness, technological innovation, ability to solve a gardening problem or provide a gardening opportunity, and potential appeal to gardeners. Winners of the 2026 Green Thumb Awards were chosen by two groups: There's a people's choice group of awards voted on by the public and a professional choice group of awards voted on by horticulture experts at the National Garden Bureau (NGB). I am a member of the NGB, and I voted with the public on just about every category. A few of these winners also won All-America Selections honors that I wrote about earlier this year.

Last year, the public liked the Flowerfull Smooth Hydrangea, but this year they picked an azalea that can rebloom until fall.

In the annuals category, the public chose Sunflower Sunfinity Yellow-Red Bicolor. It has beautiful 4-inch flowers on 3-foot-tall plants that are perfect for pots or the garden. It has continuous flowers for three months. Everyone loves sunflowers, except the professionals who chose Dipladenia Sun Parasol FiredUp Coral. It is a very pretty vine that stands up like a shrub, and I would love one on my patio, but the public got this one right. The public chose Fescue Glow Sticks as their perennial. It is a nice ornamental grass that survives heat and drought, but I prefer big, showy flowers in my yard. The pros picked Crocosmia Dark Fire, a dark red late-season flower that attracts hummingbirds and is deer- and rabbit-resistant. I have to side with the hummingbird-attracting flower on this one. For edible plants, the public chose the Tomato BadaBing! F1 (the exclamation point is part of the name). It is about as

disease-resistant a tomato as there can be. The professionals picked Basil Treviso for its slow flowering and for keeping its flavor longer in the season. For me, cherry tomatoes are way better than any basil. For a houseplant, the public chose Pothos Yellow Sunrise, which is a very common houseplant in a new color, and as the plant matures, some of the leaves will develop holes and splits like the very popular Monstera. The pros are pros because they grow plants that the general public doesn't, so they picked Cape Primrose Lady Slippers Double Blue Vein. I love flowers, so I like the primrose. If you can grow an African violet, then you can grow the primrose. The garden product category has two very different products. The public picked Sunshine Black Bear Indoor & Outdoor Potting Mix. This makes sense because every garden needs potting soil. This particular mix includes wood biochar, which is a type of charcoal. It helps absorb nutrients, making them available to plants and microbes. It holds water, and it has reduced carbon dioxide emissions in its production. This mix also doesn't have perlite, which means I don't have to put up with all those white beads on top of the soil in my pots. The pros picked a tabletop self-contained aquarium/terrarium. It looks like a fun product that I should buy, but it can't beat a new type of potting soil. You can't go wrong choosing a hydrangea in the shrub category. Last year, the public liked the Flowerfull Smooth Hydrangea, but this year they picked an azalea that can rebloom until fall. The Azalea Encore Autumn Kiss has white and pink flowers on a 3-foot-tall shrub. Of course, the pros picked a hydrangea. Hydrangea Centennial Ruby does have ruby red flowers. It grows 3 feet tall in hardiness zones 4–9. To find out more about these winners, go to the National Garden Bureau website at NGB.org and click on the New Plants tab.

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SMOOTH SAILING/SHUTTERSTOCK



PREPAREDNESS

The True Cost of a House Fire

Practical challenges, financial strain, and grief all set in after losing a home

By Shannon Martin

I'm standing there watching my house burn, and I'm like, oh my goodness, this is everything that I worked for." When Rahkim Sabree followed a gut feeling to return home early from an outing in October, he didn't expect to find his living room engulfed in flames. "It's when I reached the second level that I realized there was a fire, everything was black, the power was out, there was smoke everywhere," Sabree said. He attempted to put the fire out himself but had to make his way outside when he started to lose consciousness. "I called 911, and they sent over the fire department. They were able to locate and save my dog Loki, which was a blessing." Within minutes, he saw the house he had worked so hard for and the life he had built

disappear. The fire that tore through his home became a turning point—one that exposed the emotional weight of loss, the surprising financial realities of recovery, and the crucial role home insurance can play when you lose it all. Sabree is sharing his story not for sympathy, but for preparedness. He said he hopes that by opening up about what he's facing, he can give readers a clearer picture of what having a total home loss is really like. Understanding your home insurance and having financial buffers in place can help you use your coverage more effectively, preserving the emotional bandwidth needed to focus on healing—not just survival. After a House Fire, Insurance May Not Be Enough Without Savings The U.S. Fire Administration reports that 344,600 homes, including one- and two-family units and apartments, were affected by residential fires in 2023. Most homeowners focus on carrying enough dwelling coverage, which pays to rebuild the physical structure of your home

SAFETY

What to Do When an Earthquake Hits

When the ground begins to shake, a few calm, practiced actions can mean the difference between panic and protection

By Sandy Lindsey

The most important thing to do when the ground begins to shake is to stay calm. That may be easier said than done, but knowing what to do will go a long way toward keeping panic at bay. If you're indoors, stay indoors. If you're outside, stay outside. Immediately drop to your hands and knees to improve your balance. Crawl to a protected location, such as under a sturdy table or desk. It's important to cover your head and neck and, ideally, your entire body if possible. Be prepared to hold the table or desk in place over you, if needed. This is the basis of the mantra: Drop, cover, and hold on.

Indoor Actions

What happened to the old-fashioned advice to stand in a doorway? Better home construction. The "doorway is the safest spot" advice actually dates back to old adobe homes out West, where often only the doorway was left standing after a big shake. In modern homes, the openings (doorways and windows) aren't stronger structurally. Plus, they don't protect against flying or falling objects like a table would. No available tables? Crawl to the nearest interior wall, and protect your

head and neck by covering them with your arms, a pillow, a folded blanket, or a large book (think oversized coffee table picture books). Stay away from exterior walls, windows, fireplaces, tall furniture (such as an armoire), and objects that could fall or shatter. Once settled, stay in place, because moving around increases the risk of injuries.

What happened to the old-fashioned advice to stand in a doorway? Better home construction.

The exception to this is when in bed. Then it's probably simplest to roll over face down and cover your head and neck with a pillow, particularly if there isn't a table or desk in the room large enough to get underneath. Those in wheelchairs will want to move to a safe location, lock their wheels, remain seated, and protect their head and neck as best as possible. This holds true if outdoors as well. Note: These actions also apply if in a high-rise building during a quake. Keep in

GARDEN

Hints and Tips

Green Thumb Awards

The National Garden Bureau recently announced its 2026 winners.

People's Choice



ANNUAL
Sunflower Sunfinity Yellow-Red Bicolor



SHRUB
Azalea Encore Autumn Kiss®



EDIBLE
Tomato BadaBing! F1



PERENNIAL
Fescue Glow Sticks



GARDEN PRODUCT
Sunshine® Black Bear® Indoor and Outdoor Potting Mix



HOUSEPLANT
Pothos Yellow Sunrise

Professional Choice



ANNUAL
Dipladenia Sun Parasol FiredUp Coral



EDIBLE
Basil Treviso



GARDEN PRODUCT
WaterPlants, Grow Aquatic Plants Easily From Seed



HOUSEPLANT
Cape Primrose Lady Slippers Double Blue Vein



PERENNIAL
Crocosmia Dark Fire



SHRUB
Hydrangea Centennial Ruby™

Source and photos: National Garden Bureau

Creators.com Bob Kast





Even if the house remains standing after a fire, smoke and water damage may render it uninhabitable.

and is crucial for meeting your mortgage requirements. But other policy coverage types play a significant role in helping you rebuild your life after a loss.

After a few hours in the hospital, Sabree stayed at his mom’s house for a couple of days before moving into a hotel. More than 30 days later, he was still in temporary housing.

“From a housing perspective, even a clothing perspective, I had to figure out ‘how do I establish safety in this moment?’” Sabree said.

Here’s where loss of use coverage—otherwise known as additional living expense (ALE)—comes into play.

When your home is uninhabitable from a covered claim, ALE helps pay for temporary housing, pet boarding, laundry services, food, and other expenses incurred from having to live away from your home. ALE is automatically built into every homeowner policy and typically has a payout limit of 20 percent of your dwelling coverage. For example, a homeowner’s insurance policy with \$300,000 in dwelling coverage would likely have \$60,000 in ALE coverage.

ALE is processed differently by every carrier, and complicated losses can slow payments. Sabree’s temporary housing is being arranged through a claims management company, for example. But thanks to his emergency savings and community support, he hasn’t had to pay out of pocket

for housing—at least, not yet. But many families don’t have that safety net.

Claim payouts can take anywhere from a few days to several weeks—longer if the claim is complex, as in the case of a total loss of a home. Yet 24 percent of Americans have no emergency savings, and 30 percent have less than three months’ worth, according to Bankrate’s Annual Emergency Savings Report. That leaves many homeowners covering basic living costs out of pocket while still paying the mortgage on a home they can’t live in.

“Some carriers, especially surplus lines, make homeowners pay ALE costs, like a hotel, then reimburse them,” said Chantal Roberts, an insurance claims expert and educator. “Food is almost always out-of-pocket first, and receipts are required.”

Since ALE isn’t used as often as other parts of a home insurance policy, confusion surrounding this coverage is common. It’s designed to cover only the increase in your living expenses when all or part of your home is unsafe to live in. For example, Roberts said that if your kitchen is unusable but the rest of the house is still considered livable, your insurer might provide a temporary solution such as a two-burner stove, rather than pay for a full hotel stay.

And importantly, it’s the insurer—not the homeowner—who determines whether the home is considered livable. Feeling uncomfortable is very different from living in a structure that is truly uninhabitable. Since a full rebuild can take months, homeowners who are eligible for an ALE payment but overspend early on may exhaust their coverage long before they can return home.

Adding an endorsement to increase your ALE coverage is typically inexpensive. You may want to consider contacting your agent to quote extra coverage if:

- Local rent or hotel prices are high
- You have a large family
- You have pets that would need boarding
- You work from home
- You have a home that would take a long time to rebuild

The Reality of Personal Property Coverage After a Fire

Another coverage that is often overlooked is personal property coverage. Most homeowners’ and renters’ insurance policies include personal property coverage at actual cash value, which encompasses the replacement cost minus depreciation. For renters, personal property is the first coverage they select on their policies; for homeowners, coverage usually defaults to 50 percent of the dwelling limit—for instance, \$150,000 on a policy with

\$300,000 in dwelling coverage.

For many, \$150,000 sounds like a lot of coverage to replace some furniture and clothing. But what if you had to replace everything you owned, down to your toothbrush?

“All the clothes that I’m wearing right now have been given to me,” Sabree said. “All of the clothes that I owned, outside of the clothes that were on my back, were in the house and damaged by either smoke, water, or fire.”

Standard personal property coverage rarely stretches as far as people imagine. Even with a replacement cost endorsement (which pays to replace items at the current market cost), homeowners must pay up front for new items before receiving reimbursement, a hurdle many don’t anticipate.

Standard personal property coverage rarely stretches as far as people imagine.

“Insurance adjusters typically determine the age, value, and depreciation of items,” Roberts said. “The insurer pays actual cash value first, and the homeowner gets depreciation back only after replacing the item and proving the cost.”

For example, let’s say you paid \$5,000 for your sofa seven years ago and it costs \$6,000 for a new one now. Your carrier may pay you \$3,000 for the actual cash value of your old sofa. Once you purchase the new one and submit proof, they will send you the other \$3,000.

Policy contracts typically allow a year to replace belongings, yet without savings, some homeowners can afford to replace only a fraction of what they have lost. It isn’t ideal, but as Sabree points out, it’s still better than starting from nothing.

“Until you’re in a situation where you have to replace everything, you don’t realize how important insurance is,” Sabree said. “If you don’t want to go into debt—or deeper into debt—it becomes a financial buffer. We all hope we never have to use it, and it feels like you’re paying extra for something you’ll never need. But when you do need it, it’s there.”

Navigating the Financial and Emotional Trauma of Home Fires

“The biggest heartbreak was losing my books,” Sabree said. “I had books that were 20 years old. Books that were given to me by my grandfather, who’s no longer here. Inscriptions written on the cover by him that I could refer back to when I wanted to hear from him. You can’t put a price on that.”

Sabree works as a financial therapist and accredited financial counselor,

providing education to help people overcome financial anxiety, stress, and systemic barriers to reach financial success.

In fact, his book, “Overcoming Financial Trauma,” was published less than 30 days after he lost his home. The irony isn’t lost on him that he has to work on his own personal trauma while juggling speaking engagements and the claims process.

When we asked him what it’s like having to follow his own advice, he said: “Sobering and ironic. It’s a reminder that trauma—and recovery—can happen to anyone, regardless of knowledge or experience.”

This is the part of losing your home to a fire that homeowners’ insurance can’t fix. But it’s one that shouldn’t be ignored. Shock, mourning, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder are some of the emotional barriers homeowners may deal with after a fire. Even when the fire is out, homeowners can find themselves reliving the experience when they return to the home during the claims process.

Along with reduced focus, memory issues, and irritability, what Sabree calls “trauma brain,” he described some moments as “embarrassing and invasive”—seeing inventory technicians comb through his belongings, picking up burnt, soggy clothing and tossing it into a pile. To add insult to injury, on a return visit with a plumber, he discovered that someone had broken in and stolen all the copper piping and heating units. They even manage to steal one of his few remaining good pairs of shoes, leaving their own in its place.

Still, Sabree sees the silver lining. Since he works for himself, he has “freedom” that many other homeowners don’t. Traumatic events can have a long-term physical and mental effect, and since he can make his own schedule, he can deal with his feelings when they arise.

“From a trauma lens,” Sabree said, “there have been things that come up on day 15 that didn’t on day 3. There are things I have only just now been able to navigate on day 29 that I haven’t been able to deal with earlier.”

Although home insurance can’t fix everything, it can ease some of the financial burden. For others going through similar situations, Sabree advises:

“Seek safety, then stabilize that safety emotionally and financially. Protect your mental space. And financially, focus only on essential expenses, housing, utilities, and food, before worrying about replacing everything.”

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mind that structures built in earthquake zones are designed to sway somewhat. Also, power may go out and fire sprinklers may be set off. Stay calm. If you’re in a public space, such as a restaurant or mall, do not rush to the exits, as they will probably be crowded. Follow the guidelines above. In a theater or stadium, stay in your seat, protecting your head and neck as best as possible.

Outside Plan

A wide-open area is the best spot. This means away from trees, streetlights, telephone poles, utility wires, buildings, bridges, or overpasses, as objects may fall off them or they could collapse.

If there’s a sturdy backyard table or structure nearby, drop and crawl under it. Otherwise, simply drop to the ground and cover your head and neck with your arms. Stay alert for falling and projectile debris. Those in the mountains should be aware of the potential for falling rocks and landslides.

Vehicular Wisdom

Turn on the hazard lights and pull over as soon as it’s safe to stop. Turn off the engine, put on the parking brake, and keep the seatbelt on. Avoid overpasses, bridges, power lines, trees, and parking garages, if at all possible. Definitely avoid expansion joints (those metal toothed plates that allow the road slabs to shift) on elevated highways. They’re weak points.

Turn on the radio to get the latest updates. In most cases, it’s best to stay in the vehicle, with two big exceptions: if there’s a smell of gasoline (i.e., danger of fire or explosion), or if there is a tsunami alert. In which case, go two miles inland or 100 feet above sea level.



FCAFTODIGITAL/GETTY IMAGES

▲ Emergency preparation should include food, water, communication, and medication for all members of the household.

Some low-lying coastal areas have, or are building, vertical evacuation towers, structures, mounds, or other designated areas for this purpose.

Aftermath Actions

There may be aftershocks. Be prepared to Drop, Cover, and Hold On again during the minutes, hours, and even days following.

If barefoot, put on sturdy shoes to protect against broken glass or other scattered pointy objects. Put out any small fires. If there’s a gas smell or any other concern, shut off the gas and the electricity. In fact, if you know how to do it safely, it’s not a bad idea to shut off the electrical main on the chance that there is unseen damaged wiring. Turn off the water supply at the first sign of leaks. Inspect yourself and others for injuries.

Treat as required immediately to reduce the chance of infection. Do not move the seriously injured unless they are in catastrophic danger, such as in the imminent collapse of a building, or first responders are not available. Never take an elevator.

Stuck in a building or vehicle? Send a text message, if possible, with relevant details about your location and status to friends and family, including those out of the danger zone who may have the best service. Hear rescuers? Bang on pipes or otherwise make noise.

All safe? Good. Send that message to family and friends. Consider installing a panic alarm app.

Sandy Lindsey is an award-winning writer who covers home, gardening, DIY projects, pets, and boating. She has two books with McGraw-Hill.

Quake Prep

A high-capacity backup battery for the cellphone to keep in touch, a battery-powered radio to keep informed, and a whistle are just the start.

SECURE IT BEFOREHAND

Use putty-like QuakeHOLD! to keep display items and books on shelves, lamps and vases on end tables, and other items on their respective surfaces. Then check out the wide variety of specialized straps, hooks, brackets, and latches for TVs, mirrors, pictures, bookcases, refrigerators, water heaters, kitchen cabinet doors, and more that can be found online.

72 HOURS

Have a three-day supply of nonperishable food, water, and medicine for each family member, including pets. Also, have a reliable flashlight and extra batteries (candles can cause a fire), hand sanitizer, and/or spare eyeglasses or contacts. Keep cash and important papers in a waterproof pouch.

FAMILY MATTERS

Choose a location to reunite the family if separated when a quake hits. Kids in school or daycare? Discuss their policies beforehand, and set up an approved alternate pickup person. Have drills that teach the young ones the safest spots in the home and elsewhere. Give them a list of emergency phone numbers.



Everyday Household Money Leaks

Small habits, from fiddling with the thermostat to taking long showers, can quietly inflate your monthly bills

If money had a sound, the most annoying noise in your house wouldn't be the teenager's subwoofer or the dryer thumping an unbalanced load. It would be silence. The quiet drip of habits so small and ordinary that nobody notices them—until the checking account screams for mercy.

Most people don't overspend in dramatic ways. What gets them instead is a collection of everyday household behaviors that seem harmless, even sensible, but quietly siphon cash week after week. The good news is that nearly every one of these leaks has a fix, and most of those fixes cost less than a single grocery run.

 **THERMOSTAT**
Start with the thermostat. Not the obvious “crank the heat to tropical” problem, but the constant nudging up and down throughout the day. Heating and cooling systems work hardest when they're forced to recover repeatedly, and that effort shows up on the utility bill. A basic programmable thermostat, which can be found for about \$30 to \$50, removes temptation from the equation by doing the thinking for you. Set it once for sleeping, waking, and away hours, then leave it alone. Pair that with a \$10 throw blanket or an extra sweater, and you've just lowered your energy bill without sacrificing comfort.

 **LIGHTING**
Lighting is another quiet drain. Not the all-lights-on-

all-night scenario but rooms lit long after everyone has wandered elsewhere, porch lights glowing until dawn out of habit, and lamps switched on automatically because that's how it's always been done. Swapping frequently used bulbs for LEDs costs roughly \$2 to \$4 per bulb and cuts lighting costs dramatically over time. Adding a \$7 plug-in timer for outdoor lights or a motion sensor for entryways handles the forgetfulness factor without any lectures required.

 **WATER**
Water waste sneaks up in a similar fashion: long showers justified as “a few extra minutes,” faucets running while dishes wait their turn, or washing machines started half-full because patience ran out. Water may be cheap, but heating it is not. A low-flow showerhead, available for about \$15, cuts hot water use without turning your shower into a drizzle. Faucet aerators, which screw on in seconds and cost about \$3 each, reduce flow while keeping the pressure feeling normal. Waiting until the washer is full costs nothing and pays off every single month.

 **FOOD**
The kitchen is a particularly friendly place for financial leaks. Food bought with good intentions but forgotten behind newer groceries is one of the most expensive habits in the house. The solution doesn't require airtight contain-

ers or color-coded systems. A simple \$1 roll of painter's tape and a marker to label leftovers with dates works surprisingly well. So does a once-a-week fridge check before grocery shopping, which costs nothing and routinely saves \$20 or more by preventing duplicate purchases.

 **CLEANING**
Cleaning habits also quietly eat into a budget. Overusing detergent and specialty sprays feels productive, but it burns through supplies faster and often leaves residue that requires more cleaning later. Most laundry loads get cleaner with about half the detergent recommended on the label. Switching to that habit alone can cut detergent purchases nearly in half. A reusable spray bottle, which costs about \$2, paired with a simple all-purpose cleaner recipe, eliminates the need for a dozen single-use products without sacrificing results.

 **CONVENIENCE**
Convenience creep shows up when disposables start replacing reusables. Paper towels for everything, bottled water because it's “easier,” and single-use items filling drawers because they're handy. A stack of microfiber cloths, usually less than \$10 for a dozen, replaces rolls of paper towels for years. A reusable water bottle, often \$8 or less, pays for itself within a week or two. These swaps feel small but stop

an ongoing drain that never announces itself.

 **ELECTRONICS**
Electronics play their part as well. Devices left on standby, chargers plugged in permanently, and televisions humming to empty rooms all draw power even when they're not being used. A basic power strip with an on-off switch, available for about \$10, lets you shut down multiple devices at once. Turning things fully off isn't about becoming militant; it's about not paying for electricity nobody is enjoying.

 **MAINTENANCE**
Maintenance habits matter too. Ignoring small issues because they seem minor often turns them into expensive replacements later. A \$5 tube of adhesive or a \$10 repair kit used early prevents a \$100 replacement down the road. Using what you have a little more carefully stretches the life of everyday items far longer than most people expect.

What makes these habits dangerous isn't their size—it's their invisibility. They don't feel like splurges. They feel normal. And that's exactly why they work so efficiently against your budget.

The fix isn't living like a monk. It's noticing patterns and choosing simple tools that do the remembering for you. Small adjustments, made once and stuck with, quietly outperform dramatic financial resolutions every time.

How and When to Clean Your Keurig

A few easy DIY techniques can keep your Keurig brewing fresh cups every day

Although drinking coffee has health benefits, using your Keurig machine daily without routine cleaning and maintenance can lead to awful consequences.

It's essential to clean a Keurig because it can be a health hazard if not cleaned properly. Like any coffee maker (or espresso machine), Keurigs can grow mold if not properly drained, descaled, and cleaned. Cleaning keeps mold and bacteria at bay but also removes the mineral buildup in the machine that affects the coffee taste and quality. A clean Keurig makes better-tasting coffee. These are the steps to clean the machine:

Cleaning keeps mold and bacteria at bay but also removes the mineral buildup in the machine that affects the coffee taste and quality.

Step No. 1: Unplug the machine. Next, disassemble your Keurig, taking note of where things go. You should be able to remove the water reservoir and lid, the drip tray, and the pod holder. Careful! You'll see a pointy needle-like spike in the top assembly, which does not come off, so don't try to remove it. In fact, be careful to avoid poking yourself.

Step No. 2: Thoroughly wash and dry the removable parts using hot, soapy water. Alternatively, you can run these parts through the dishwasher, a good idea if they are particularly skanky. In the meantime, using a damp, soapy microfiber or other dishcloth, clean and wipe down the machine's exterior. Rinse and then buff dry using a microfiber or other towel.

Step No. 3: Reassemble the machine, making sure you get everything back into its proper place.

Next, it's time to descale your Keurig. When you fill a Keurig reservoir with water with a high mineral content level, over time, this will result in a buildup of hardened calcium and mineral de-

posits, known as scale. That affects the taste of your coffee but also prevents the machine from working properly. If it is not cleaned and descaled regularly, you should expect your Keurig to face a slow, painful death. But don't worry; you can descale a Keurig using a few different methods.

It should be noted that the manufacturer recommends only one method to descale your machine: its proprietary Keurig Descaling Solution. You can purchase this online or possibly at the store where you purchased your machine.

Interestingly, the Keurig Descaling Solution is mostly citric acid, water, and inert items such as silica and bleaching agents. Hmm ...

There are two homemade options to effectively descale a Keurig machine that are definitely cheaper than the pricey stuff from the manufacturer, and possibly better and faster:

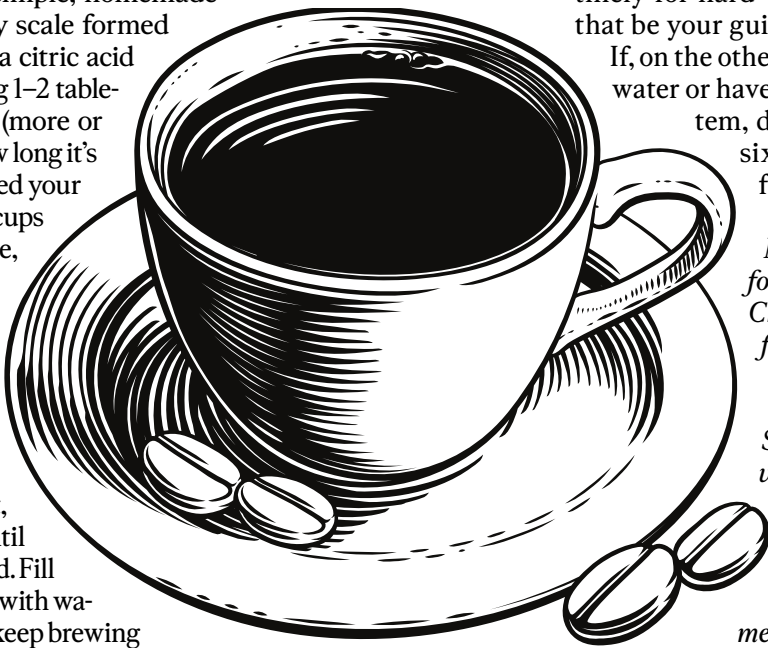
Citric Acid
Citric acid offers a simple, homemade way to eliminate any scale formed in a Keurig. Prepare a citric acid solution by combining 1-2 tablespoons of citric acid (more or less depending on how long it's been since you descaled your Keurig) with about 4 cups of water. Stir to dissolve, and then pour it into the water reservoir. Leaving the K-Cup holder empty, place a coffee mug underneath the drainage spout, brew a cup of hot water, pour it out, and repeat the step until the reservoir is emptied. Fill up the water reservoir with water a second time and keep brewing until there's nothing left in the reservoir.

You can find citric acid at spice shops, in your grocer's canning aisle, and on Amazon.

Vinegar
Like citric acid, plain white vinegar is great for sanitizing a Keurig and is a

A clean Keurig makes better-tasting coffee.

CHRISTOS GEORGHIOU/SHUTTERSTOCK



simple, homemade way to get rid of any scale that's formed. Fill the water reservoir to the halfway mark with plain white vinegar. Fill the other half with water. Begin the brew cycle, leaving the K-Cup holder empty, and repeat until the entire reservoir is empty. Repeat by filling the reservoir with plain water to flush out the vinegar taste. Is there anything that vinegar can't clean? Well, yes, there are a few things, but look at all the ways vinegar works so well to make your life easier!

The folks at Keurig say you should clean your machine once every three to six months. And that leaves a big question mark in my mind because three to six months is quite a range.

A better answer perhaps is to assess your use and the water source you use to brew coffee in your Keurig. If you make coffee several times a day and live with hard tap water, every three months is not often enough; you may need to descale once every month. Check routinely for hard water deposits and let that be your guide.

If, on the other hand, you use bottled water or have a reverse osmosis system, descaling every five to six months may be sufficient.

Mary Hunt is the founder of *EverydayCheapskate.com*, a frugal living blog, and the author of the book “Debt-Proof Living.” She invites you to visit her at her website, where this column is archived complete with links and resources for all recommended products and services. She invites questions and comments at *EverydayCheapskate.com/contact*, “Ask Mary.” Tips can be submitted at *Tips.EverydayCheapskate.com*. This column will answer questions of general interest, but letters cannot be answered individually. Copyright 2025 *Creators.com*.

ASK THE VET

Hidden Heart Disease in Cats

A specialized blood test is one of the few ways to detect cardiomyopathy in otherwise healthy cats

By Lee Pickett

Q Rambo, my 2-year-old cat, was breathing fast during his annual wellness exam. His veterinarian said his rapid breathing could be due to stress, heart disease, or a respiratory condition such as asthma.

She did a blood test called NT-proBNP, which indicated that he may have heart disease, and she referred me to a cardiologist who confirmed that Rambo has cardiomyopathy. Now he takes medicine to improve his heart function and prolong his life.

I'm grateful my veterinarian recognized the possibility that Rambo might have heart disease and that she did the NT-proBNP test. How does this blood test reveal heart disease?

A Heart muscle cells produce small amounts of a hormone called BNP and its inactive precursor, NT-proBNP. Heart disease causes the heart to enlarge and the heart muscle cells to stretch, which makes them secrete more of these chemicals.

NT-proBNP is more stable than BNP, and the magnitude of the NT-proBNP elevation reflects the severity of heart disease.

So veterinarians use it as a marker for heart enlargement, heart disease, and congestive heart failure.

The most common type of heart disease in cats is cardiomyopathy, which rarely produces clinical signs. Surprisingly, 15 percent of ostensibly healthy cats have cardiomyopathy. The prevalence of heart disease is even higher



in Maine coon cats and the Persian, ragdoll, and sphynx breeds.

When cardiomyopathy does produce clinical signs, those may consist of abnormal breathing, an erratic heart rhythm, or a heart murmur. More often,

cats with cardiomyopathy die suddenly or develop a blood clot that lodges in an artery to the back legs, causing severe pain and inability to walk.

Your veterinarian likely saved Rambo's

life during what started out as just a routine wellness exam.

Q During the dry fall and winter seasons, people who visit our house and pet our dog Winston often shock him with static electricity. He is beginning to distrust people, sometimes raising his lip when they reach to pet him. What can we do?

A Adding moisture to the air works wonders, so have a whole-house humidifier installed in your home, or purchase smaller humidifiers for the rooms Winston frequents.

Until then, spritz Winston and the carpeting in your home with water, or wipe Winston with a damp washcloth or pet wipe. Also, you and your guests can discharge static electricity by touching something else before you pet Winston.

Bathe Winston with a moisturizing shampoo and then apply a pet creme rinse or moisturizer spray. Use an anti-static spray on your clothes, shoes, and carpeting.

You can also wipe a dryer sheet across Winston's coat, as long as he doesn't lick himself. Some dryer sheets and anti-static sprays contain ingredients that cause mouth sores and vomiting in pets that ingest them when they lick themselves.

To help Winston rebuild trust, have your friends drop a small treat on the floor near themselves so he is rewarded as he approaches them. Then, they can offer a treat from their hands, but only after they've touched something to discharge any static electricity before it shocks Winston. Finally, as long as he's relaxed and willing, they can pet him while they give him a treat.

Lee Pickett, VMD, practices companion animal medicine in North Carolina. Copyright 2026 Lee Pickett, VMD. Distributed by Creators.com.

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