

Daly City Library & Recreation Services
Active Adult/Senior Services
presents



Current Events with Frank Damon

Doelger Senior Center has been fortunate to have Frank Damon leading both our Current Events and History discussion groups for the last 6 years. During this time of physical distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Frank is sharing his current events discussion topics online. Starting on Monday, January 4, 2021 at 1:30 pm Frank will offer Current Events discussion groups each Monday on ZOOM.

Daly City Active Adult/Senior Services invites you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Current Events with Frank Damon

Time: 1:30 pm – 2:30 pm every Monday

Join Zoom meeting with following link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87222786510?pwd=d0VucFhGYzhMMXVhSUNJTmdFWDNwdz09>

Meeting ID: 872 2278 6510

Passcode: 724368

Frank received his BA degree from the University of San Francisco with a dual major in Political Science and American History. He also earned his MA in Political Science and teaching credentials at USF. Over the course of his career, Frank taught in the San Mateo Union High School District and at Marin Catholic High School, Terra Nova High School, Golden Gate University, College of San Mateo, Skyline College and Canada College.

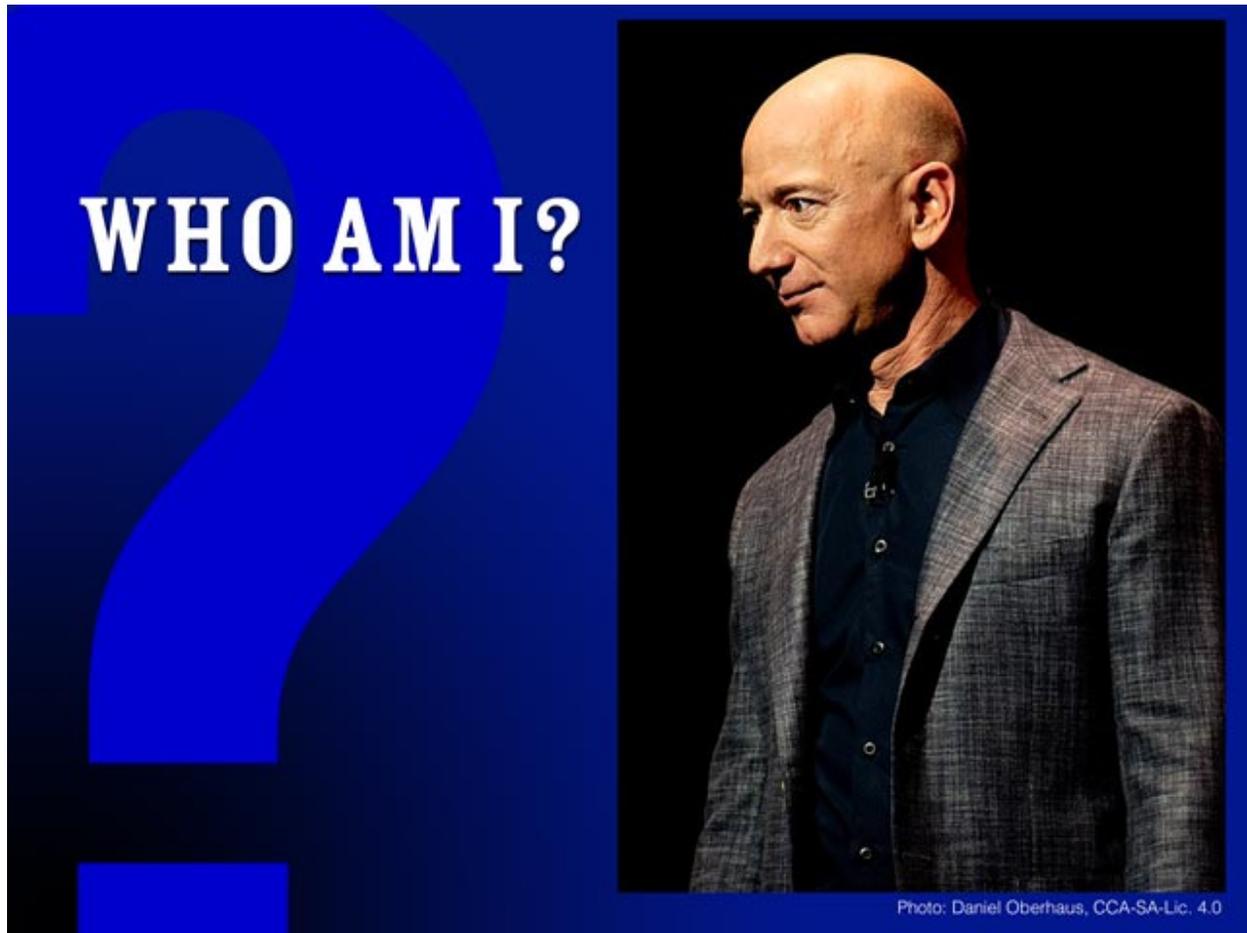
If you are interested in joining *Current Events with Frank Damon*, please go to www.dalycityseniors.org/current-events or contact Frank directly at frankdamon@my.smccd.edu.

Man in the News

He is the founder of Amazon.com as well as the owner of the Washington Post newspaper as well as the founder of Blue Origin a spaceflight company. He was born on January 12th, 1964 in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

His company Amazon started as an online bookstore, but now operates supermarkets and even creates original tv and movie content for streaming. He was named as the richest person in the world twice in a row by Forbes, and his net worth has reached 192.8 billion as of this year.

Recently Amazon employees in Bessemer Alabama have tried to create a union, but the company has fought against it.



(Who Am I? *Jeff Bezos*)

Myanmar Crisis Deepens

Last year, the nation of Myanmar held just its second free election in history. Where is Myanmar? (In Southeast Asia.) The ruling National League for Democracy party, known as NLD, maintained about 80 percent of the seats in the country's government. But leaders of the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's largely independent military, claimed that the elections had not been fair.

On February 1, 2021, the Tatmadaw overthrew Myanmar's elected government in a coup. This triggered many protests like the one shown here. As you can see, many demonstrators held up pictures of former State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. The position of state counsellor is equivalent to prime minister. She and other government officials have been detained since the coup. The Tatmadaw claimed that protesters were violent criminals, and started firing bullets into crowds of demonstrators, killing more than 500 people, and arresting thousands more. They also killed some people in their homes. What does the quote below tell you about the mindset of the Tatmadaw?

Despite the violent crackdown, people are still protesting. Over Easter weekend, protesters wrote anti-coup messages on Easter eggs and posted them on social media. Was this a smart way to get their message out? Many foreign nations, including the U.S. and Canada, have condemned Myanmar's military. President Biden signed an executive order for sanctions against members of Myanmar's military government and their families.

Myanmar crisis deepens

Military kills hundreds of protesters



“They see protesters as criminals because if someone disobeys or protests the military they are criminal.”

—Former military leader
Tun Myat Aung

Myanmar was originally known as Burma. It was a British colony for many years before an independence movement led by General Aung San, founder of the Tatmadaw as a self-defense force. But Aung San was assassinated just six months before the country's independence. Thirteen years later, the Tatmadaw overthrew the country's elected government to establish a communist dictatorship. Many citizens protested against this five-decade military reign, including Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Aung San. She helped lead the 8888 Uprising on August 8th, 1988, gaining international recognition for her fight for democracy. Do you think her family's history helped make her protest more legitimate?

When Myanmar held a national election in 1990, the NLD won 81 percent of the government seats. But the government refused to honor the election, and placed Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest for years. When she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, her sons had to accept on her behalf, as she could not leave the country. The military finally stepped down in 2011, and four years later in 2015, Myanmar held its first truly free election. The NLD won a huge majority of seats. Aung San Suu Kyi — barred from the presidency because she married a foreigner — served as state counsellor and de facto ruler. What does “de facto” mean? (In fact, if not in name.) Last year, the NLD won again in a landslide. But the Tatmadaw, led by General Min Aung Hlaing, refused to accept the results and seized power once again.

Timeline:

1988 — 8888 Uprising against military government

1991 — Aung San Suu Kyi wins Nobel Prize

2015 — First free elections, NDL party wins

2020 — NDL wins second election

2021 — Military takes over government again



Flag of the National League for Democracy



**Min Aung Hlaing, chair of
State Administration Council**

Photo: Milru, CCA-SA-Lic. 4.0



**Deposed State Counsellor
Aung San Suu Kyi**

Photo: Claude Truong-Ngoc, CCA-SA-Lic. 3.0

Aung San Suu Kyi's government was not perfect in the eyes of the international community — especially when it came to the treatment of Myanmar's Rohingya people. In fact, her actions relating to the Rohingya greatly tarnished her reputation as a courageous democratic reformer. The Rohingya originated on the Indian subcontinent, settling mainly in the western state of Rakhine. Rohingya have been persecuted for being foreigners, immigrants, and for their

religious views. What is the source of this religious conflict? (Most Myanmarese follow Buddhism, while nearly all Rohingya follow Islam.) Persecution against the Rohingya has taken many forms. A constitutional amendment in 1982 deprived them of citizenship and voting rights. They have also suffered many physical and military attacks over the years. Many were punished for supporting the 8888 Uprising, fleeing to neighboring Bangladesh. Rohingya activists hoped for change when the NDL rose to power in 2015. The next year, however, the Tatmadaw waged a military campaign against Rohingya in Rakhine. General Min Aung Hlaing oversaw the bombing and burning of villages, and the killing of as many as 25,000 Rohingya during this time. More than 700,000 managed to escape into Bangladeshi refugee camps. Do you think this should be considered an ethnic cleansing campaign? Many hoped that Aung San Suu Kyi would denounce this violence. Instead, she downplayed the attacks as a national security matter and said other countries should not criticize Myanmar.

What does this crisis mean for Myanmar's Rohingya people?



Burnt village in Rakhine state

Photo: Zlatica Hoke, VOA; Public Domain

Refugee camp in Bangladesh



Photo: Zlatica Hoke, VOA; Public Domain

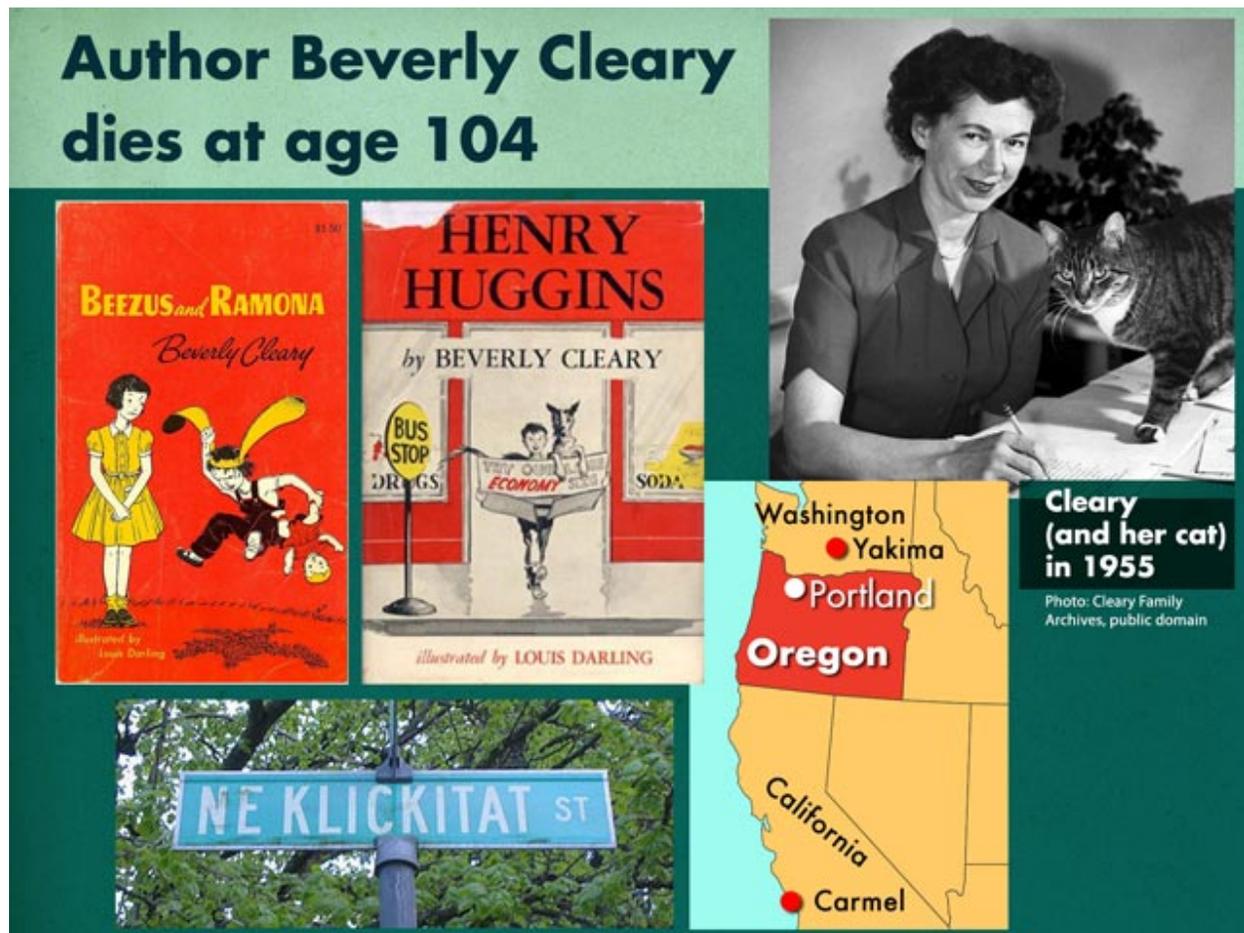
"I do not think military dictatorship is the solution... [but] the Aung San Suu Kyi government was not easy to work with [and] did not do anything to protect the Rohingya."

—Activist Wai Wai Nu

Author Beverly Cleary dies at age 104

Beverly Cleary was one of the most famous and successful children's authors in history. She passed away on March 25th, just weeks shy of what would have been her 105th birthday on April 12th. Her books had a knack for finding humor and surprise in every aspect of life. This was especially true for the books set on Klickitat Street in Portland, Oregon. Is this a real street? (Yes — Cleary lived near it as a young girl.) As a first-grade student at Portland's Fernwood Grammar School, Cleary struggled with reading, which embarrassed her. But she persisted, and by the time she was in sixth grade, her teacher suggested she might be a writer. After that, she started practicing writing all the time.

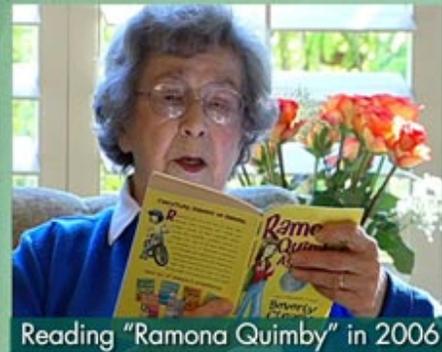
As a young woman, she worked as a children's librarian in Yakima, Washington. Later, she and her husband settled in Carmel, California, where she spent the rest of her life. In the late 1940s, Cleary finally finished her first novel, "Henry Huggins." When a publisher rejected it, Cleary decided to add two girls to the book. Do you know who these characters were? (Beatrice, known as "Beezus," and her sweet but rambunctious little sister Ramona.) These characters helped the novel become very popular when it was finally published in 1950. They also went on to become characters in their own books set on Klickitat Street. Cleary ended up writing more than 40 books for young people in many different styles, selling a total of 91 million copies worldwide. In 2008, Fernwood Grammar School was renamed Beverly Cleary School



As a children’s librarian in Yakima, Washington, Beverly Cleary was always trying to get young people to love books. But she didn’t have an answer when one boy asked her, “Where are the books about kids like us?” For this reason, Cleary wrote about kids in a way that reflected honest feelings and emotions. Many experts consider Cleary to be one of the first children’s authors to use “emotional realism” in her stories. Do you think this is one of the reasons her books resonate with so many people?

She tried not to make her characters too perfect...or too horrid. Ramona, a one dimensional brat in early books, was later revealed to be sweet and intelligent, though sometimes misunderstood. Not everything Cleary wrote was as realistic as the books set on Klickitat Street. For example, 1965’s “The Mouse and the Motorcycle” and its two sequels, “Runaway Ralph” and “Ralph S. Mouse,” featured a talking rodent with a taste for adventure. “Emily’s Runaway Imagination” takes place in the 1920s. Cleary won her first and only Newbery Medal in 1984 for “Dear Mr. Henshaw.” This epistolary novel featured a character who was bullied in school and whose parents were separating. What is an epistolary novel? (One told through letters written by the characters to each other.)

Cleary also wrote two autobiographies, “A Girl from Yamhill,” and “My Own Two Feet.” Cleary herself expressed gratitude for how things turned out for her. In an interview when she was 95 years old, she said: “I’ve had an exceptionally happy career.”

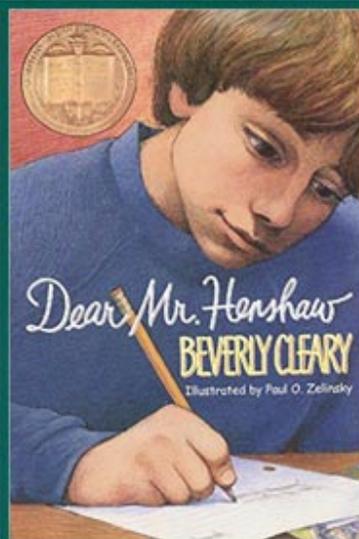
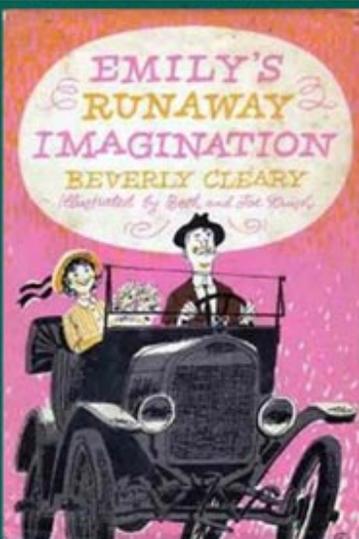
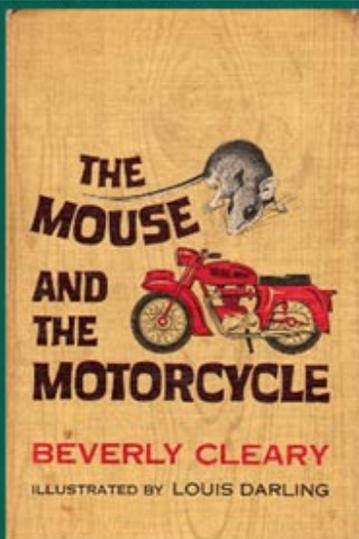


Reading "Ramona Quimby" in 2006

Photo: Harper Collins Children's Books

"If you don't see the book you want on the shelves, write it."

— Beverly Cleary



Indonesian man plants 11,000 trees over 24 years

The man shown here is an Indonesian environment activist named Sadiman. Like many Indonesians, Sadiman only goes by one name. The Indonesian archipelago contains 17,000 islands. What is an archipelago? (A group of islands.) Sadiman lives in a village on the island of Java, where over the last 24 years, he's worked to help revitalize the area's tropical forests. In the past, farmers in Java would clear forested land by burning it. But, over time, this process caused many rivers and lakes to dry up. Sadiman believed he could alleviate this problem by planting Ficus and banyan trees throughout the region. These trees have large root systems that help retain water and prevent erosion. What is erosion? (The wearing away of land by natural forces like water and wind.)

When Sadiman began his mission, many of his fellow villagers believed he'd gone crazy, but now more than 20 years later, the results of his hard work are clearly visible. Can someone read the quote here? During that time, Sadiman planted more than 11,000 trees across 617 acres. Thanks to Sadiman's efforts, new springs have formed near his village in previously dry areas. Water from these springs is now being used in the homes of villagers and to irrigate crops. When the land was drier, farmers could only harvest their crops once a year, but thanks to the new forests and springs, many can now harvest crops several times each year.

Indonesian man plants 11,000 trees over 24 years



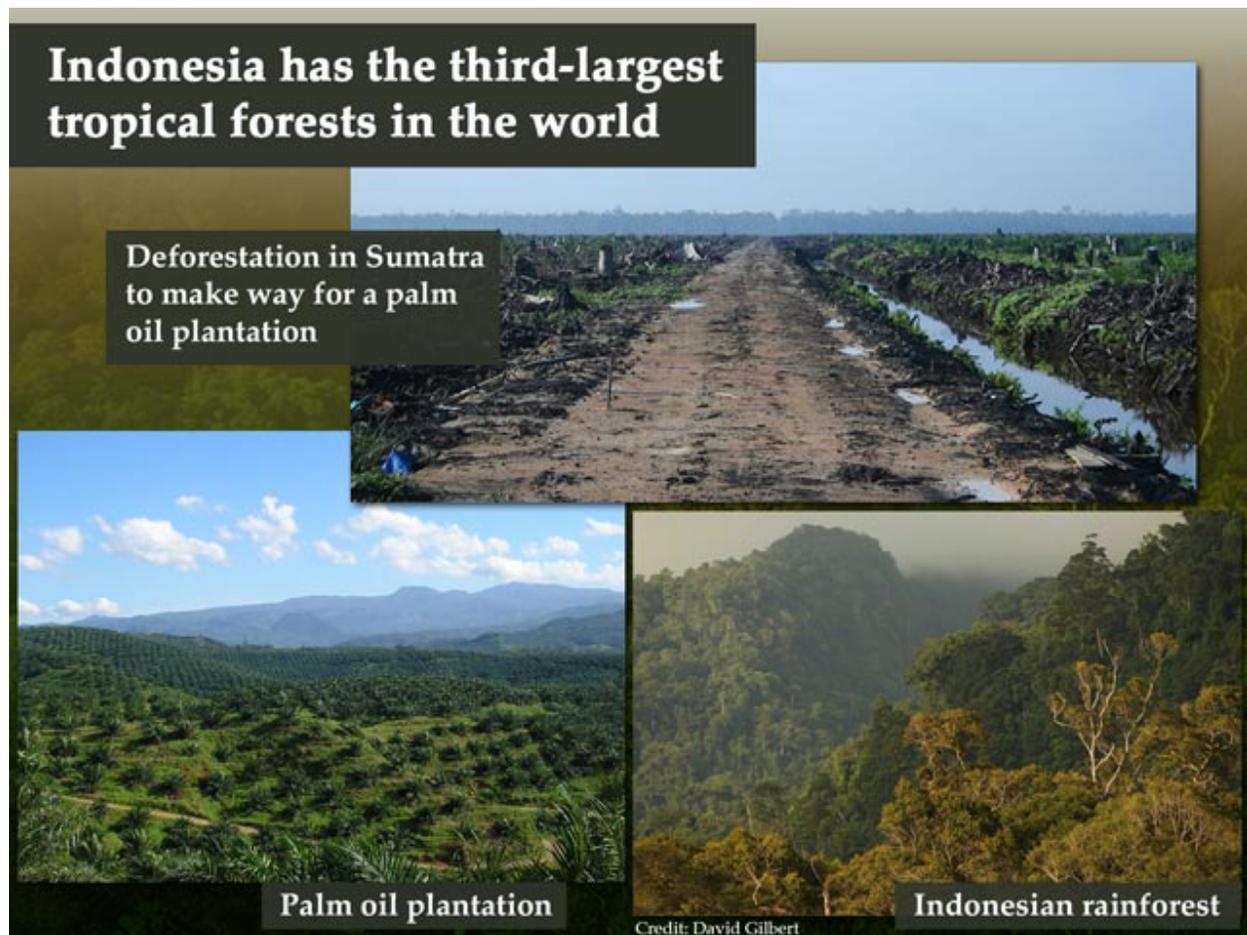
Environmental
activist Sadiman

"In the past, people thought he was crazy, but look at the result now. He is able to provide clean water to meet the needs of the people in several villages."
— *Java villager, Werto.*



The islands that make up Indonesia contain the third largest collection of tropical forests in the world. Just over 50 percent of Indonesia, or roughly 236 million acres, is covered in tropical forests. These tropical forests are vital in the fight against climate change, as they absorb a large amount of the greenhouse gases produced by the burning of fossil fuels. Why else are these tropical forests important? (They are some of the most biodiverse places in the world and contain many unique animal and plant species.) Unfortunately, the forests in Indonesia are being destroyed at an alarming rate. Here, you see photos of a healthy Indonesian forest and one showing a forested area cleared to make way for a palm oil plantation.

Indonesia supplies more than half of all the world's palm oil, which is used to produce many foods and household products. Clearing land to make way for palm oil plantations destroys the habitats of local animals, and the production of these plantations creates additional greenhouse gases. In your opinion, is it more important to produce palm oil or to save tropical forests? From 2001 to 2020, Indonesia lost 68 million acres of tree coverage, or around 17 percent of the country's total tree coverage. The main factor behind this loss is illegal logging by private companies. In recent years, the Indonesian government has put new restrictions in place to help curb the loss of forests. In 2020, the nation saw a major decrease in illegal deforestation, but experts say more work still needs to be done.



Female Conservationists Work to Protect Endangered Storks

The bird shown here is a type of stork known as the greater adjutant. Storks are large birds with long, thin legs and large bills. The greater adjutant was once common across large parts of Asia, but as of 2016, the International Union for Conservation of Nature estimated that only between 800 and 1,200 remained in the wild. Based on the map, where do the remaining greater adjutants live? (India and Cambodia.)

Pollution, habitat loss, and egg hunting are the main reasons these birds are endangered. But thanks to the hard work of a group of women in India, the greater adjutant may have a chance to recover. A wildlife biologist named Dr. Purnima Devi Barman helped organize an all-women conservation group known as the Hargila Army. Their mission is to save the greater adjutants in India. In parts of India, the birds are called hargilas, which means “bone swallows.” This refers to the fact that hargilas feed on dead animals. This makes them very important to their ecosystems. Why? (They clean up the environment and help maintain the food chain.) Ironically, this important trait made the hargilas seem unsanitary to local people, and they would cut down their nesting trees. But the Hargila Army is teaching local people to appreciate the birds and the role they play in nature. As a result, the birds’ nesting colonies have increased from only 28 to nearly 220 in several Indian cities. Dr. Barman hopes that the model created by the Hargila Army can be used to help other animals.

Female conservationists work to protect endangered storks

Greater adjutant



“When we educate women, when we involve women, we achieve a sustainable goal.”
— Dr. Purnima Devi Barman

The greater adjutant lives in India and Cambodia



The world’s 19 different stork species make up the animal family Ciconiidae. These birds are related to flamingos, herons, and ibises. As you can see below, storks vary widely in appearance and color. What features do you notice in the storks shown here? Storks are typically large birds, with some species reaching five feet in height and wingspans up to twelve feet.

While some storks have colorful bills and unique head feathers, others have bald, featherless heads like those of vultures. Most storks don't call or sing like other birds because they lack a developed syrinx, an organ responsible for creating sounds. Instead, they clatter their bills to communicate, usually during the mating process. Storks also use their bills to hunt prey. By submerging their bills in water, some storks can hunt by "feel." Once it has found something to eat, a stork can snap its bill shut in less than 25 milliseconds, which is one of the fastest reactions of all vertebrates.

Some storks, like the greater adjutant and Marabou, are considered scavengers because they feed on dead animals. Storks typically live long lives, with some reaching ages over 40. Storks are migratory birds. What does this mean? (Birds that travel from one place to another, usually over long distances.)

Some European storks travel south each year to reach Africa during the winter. They travel back to Europe during the spring and mate there in the summer. Storks create large, complex nests to house their young, and they often return to the same nests year after year.



Storks:

- Can stand up to five feet tall and some have wingspans reaching 10 feet.
- Clatter their bills to communicate
- Can sometimes live for 40 years
- Often return to the same nest year after year



Country of the Week: Greece

Greece is a southeastern European nation bordered by Albania, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Turkey. The country is made up of a mainland as well as many islands, the largest of which is Crete, and it is surrounded by the Ionian Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea. The country has a typical Mediterranean climate. What is that like? (Mostly sunny with mild temperatures.) Nearly 11 million people live in Greece. About 80 percent of the country is mountainous. The tallest mountain in the country is Mount Olympus, which is more than 9,000 feet tall at its peak. This mountain is famous for its height, as well as for its place in Greek mythology. What was its role in mythology? (Ancient Greeks believed it to be the home of the gods.) Athens is the capital and the largest city in Greece. Athens has a population of almost 4 million people. It is one of the oldest cities in the world, having been established more than 3,400 years ago. In the 5th century BCE, Athens was considered the major city of ancient Greece, and it is sometimes referred to as “the cradle of Western civilization.” Athens is now a major European city, and the continent’s largest passenger sea port is located there. Shipping and shipbuilding, tourism, banking, and fishing are among the largest sectors of Greece’s economy. However, Greece suffers from high rates of unemployment and debt, and these economic issues have led to social unrest. Have you heard about the Greek Debt Crisis? Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis—kee-ree-YAH-kos mitsoh-TAH-kiss—has been in office since 2019.



Greece has one of the oldest cultures of any country in the world, and early Greek culture is seen as foundational to all European culture. Sometime in the 7th or 8th century BCE, the poet Homer composed two epics. What is an epic? (A long poem that details the life and deeds of a mythical hero.) Homer’s epics, “The Iliad” and “The Odyssey,” are two of the most important

poems in the history of literature. Have you ever read these poems? What did you think? In the 7th century, societies began to form in Greek cities like Athens, Sparta, and Thebes. The period in which these societies were at their height—between around 800 and 146 BCE—is now collectively called “Ancient Greece.” This era is seen as one of the greatest periods of innovation in human history, boasting figures like Socrates, Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Archimedes. The Parthenon, a temple in Athens, is a symbol of Ancient Greece, and it is one of the world’s most iconic structures. Greece was taken over by the Roman Empire in 146 BCE, and it remained under foreign control by a succession of different nations up until the 19th century. In 1821, Greeks rebelled against the Ottoman Empire in the Greek War of Independence, and Greece was established as an independent republic in 1830. Another important aspect of Greek culture is its food, which combines Middle Eastern and European cuisines. Notable Greek dishes include spanakopita, feta salad, and gyros, which are a kind of sandwich made with pita bread and rotisserie-roasted meat.



This Week In History: The Polio Vaccine is Declared Safe and Effective

The man at top right is Dr. Jonas Salk. He developed one of the world's greatest medical advances: the first successful vaccine to prevent poliomyelitis — POHlee-oh-my-uh-LIE-tiss — or polio for short. Polio is a disease that attacks the central nervous system. What is the central nervous system? (The nerves in the body, especially the brain and spinal cord.) Polio can cause muscle weakness, and even paralysis. What does this mean? (That parts of people's bodies cannot work correctly.) In rare cases, people can die from this disease. Examples of this disease have been recorded since ancient times. But in the 1700s and 1800s, polio started to break out in larger numbers among older children. What are large disease outbreaks called? (Epidemics.)

Eventually, scientists in Europe discovered the virus that causes polio. What is a virus? (A tiny particle that invades the cells of living things and can cause disease.) But no one knew any safe way to stop the virus without infecting people. What have you learned about viruses and hygiene in the last year?

Dr. Jonas Salk grew up in New York City in a Jewish immigrant family and went to New York University to study medicine. One reason he chose this school was that it did not discriminate against Jewish people, as many other medical schools did in 1935. After graduating from medical school he spent more time in school to study virology. What do you think virology is? (The study of viruses.) He started along this path because he wanted to help large numbers of people in the world, rather than focusing on individual patients. Salk studied at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor with Dr. Thomas Francis, Jr., where they tried to come up with a vaccine for influenza, or the flu. How do vaccines work? (A vaccine contains a tiny amount of a weakened or dead virus, usually given to people as a shot. The body produces proteins called antibodies to fight off the effects of the virus in the vaccine; these antibodies stop the effects of any actual virus, giving people immunity to the virus.)

Salk got the chance to head his own lab at the University of Pittsburgh. There, he received funding to develop a vaccine against polio. This disease had a number of outbreaks in the 20th century, including one in 1952 that infected 58,000 people in the U.S. The biggest problem with early vaccines was that they often just gave subjects the disease they were trying to prevent. Dr. Salk came up with the revolutionary idea of killing the virus before injecting it into subjects. He tried this on himself and his family first. Then, in 1954, his team started a national test of the newer and safer polio vaccine. About two million children between the ages of six to nine took part in this test. These children became known as the Polio Pioneers. Would you have taken this vaccine? Why or why not?

The polio vaccine is declared safe and effective



Pittsburgh's "Polio Pioneers," 1954



Dr. Jonas Salk administers the vaccine



Do the children here look proud of themselves? On April 12, 1955, Dr. Francis held a press conference at the University of Michigan. There, he announced the results of the national trials, which he had been monitoring. According to Dr. Francis, the polio vaccine was, quote, “safe, effective, and potent.” People celebrated this announcement all over the world. How would you have felt?

Despite this success, however, Dr. Salk never tried to profit from his polio vaccine, saying that he developed it to save lives, not to make money. He is famously quoted as saying: “Who owns my polio vaccine? The people! Could you patent the sun?” What do you think he meant by this? Was he a hero? Why or why not?

In 1962, an oral vaccine developed by Dr. Albert Sabin was licensed. This vaccine was cheaper and easier to use in poor countries around the world. Thanks to the work of Salk, Sabin, and others, polio has been completely eliminated in the U.S., and greatly reduced in much of the rest of the world. There were fewer than 1,500 cases worldwide in 2020. Most of these were in conflict-ridden countries where medical care is scarce, and where some extremist groups actively oppose the vaccinations.

Remembering When...

Jessica Walter, one of the most talented character actresses in Hollywood, recently passed away at the age of 80. As a young actress, she was known for her beauty and intelligence onscreen. But Walter's career was rare in that it seemed to build as she got older; many of her best parts came in the last two decades. Why do you think this is such a rare phenomenon? Let's talk more about her life and her legacy. Walter was born in Brooklyn in 1941. Her father was a professional musician, and her mother was a Russian immigrant. Jessica's acting talent won her a spot at the High School of Performing Arts in New York City. Just a couple of years after graduating, she won accolades for her Broadway debut in a play by Peter Ustinov. She made guest appearances in many TV shows, as well as landing a regular role on the soap opera "Love of Life." Do you remember this show? What was your favorite soap opera, and why?

She spent the second half of the 1960s in small but noticeable roles in films such as "Grand Prix," "The Group," and "Bye Bye Braverman." In 1971, Jessica Walter landed her highest-profile role yet in "Play Misty for Me."



Here you see her in the role of Evelyn Draper, an obsessive fan of a radio disc jockey. Who played the disc jockey in this movie? (Clint Eastwood, who also directed the movie.) As the film goes on, Evelyn becomes more and more unhinged — and homicidal. Do you think this must have been a fun role for an actress? Why or why not? Walter found another fascinating role in 1974, playing police chief Amy Prentiss on an episode of "Ironside." Was it unusual to see a woman as a police chief on TV back then? Do you think this was realistic in terms of women's opportunities in the real world, as well as show business?

The character of Amy Prentiss was extremely popular with viewers, so she was brought back for installments of the “NBC Mystery Movie.” What other shows began as part of this rotating series? (“Columbo,” “McCloud,” “McMillan and Wife,” “Quincy, M.E.,” and others.) Although she only played the role four times, Jessica Walter won an Emmy Award in 1975.

Walter never stopped working, appearing in dozens of TV shows and movies over the years. She also lent her voice to animated shows and made commercials. But it wasn’t until 2003 that she found the role of her lifetime on “Arrested Development.” Walter portrayed Lucille Bluth, an out-of-touch hard drinking socialite with a mean streak towards her children and her friends. Lucille quotes, such as “It’s just one banana, Michael, how much could it cost? Ten dollars?”, are still legendary among fans of the show. Did you ever see this program? Does it sound like the kind of show you would like?

Although the first run of “Arrested Development” only lasted three years, the program’s cult audience was responsible for the show being revived twice with the same cast and characters. Her hot streak continued in the animated series “Archer,” in which she played the hard-drinking sarcastic mother of the main character. Does this sound like a copy of Lucille Bluth? The casting director for this show was looking for a “Jessica Walter” type — only to find out that Jessica Walter herself was interested.

She has also starred in two other short-lived situation comedies, as well as guest-starring on many other TV shows. And she was able to get back to her Broadway roots, winning plaudits for her role in “Anything Goes” and co-starring with her second husband, Ron Liebman, in Neil Simon’s “Rumors.”

Biden Is the Anti-Trump, and It's Working



PHOTO BY THE NEW YORK TIMES

AMERICAN POLITICS feels quieter with Joe Biden in the White House. The president's Twitter feed hasn't gone dark, but it's gone dull. Biden doesn't pick needless fights or insert himself into cultural conflicts. It's easy to go days without hearing anything the president has said, unless you go looking.

But the relative quiet is deceptive: Policy is moving at a breakneck pace. The first weeks of the Biden administration were consumed by a flurry of far-reaching executive orders that reopened America to refugees, rejoined the Paris climate accords and killed the Keystone XL oil pipeline, to name just a few. Now the House has passed, and the Senate is considering, the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, a truly sweeping piece of legislation that includes more than a half-dozen policies — like a child tax credit expansion that could cut child poverty by 50 percent — that would be presidency-defining accomplishments on their own.

It goes on. The White House just sent

Trump at this stage of his presidency (or any stage of his presidency). More tellingly, the American Rescue Plan is polling between 10 and 20 points ahead of Biden, making it one of the most popular major pieces of legislation in recent decades. In one recent poll, Republicans were asked whether Biden's plan should be abandoned for a bipartisan alternative, and they split down the middle, with as many Republicans saying the plan should be passed as abandoned. That's remarkable.

The American Rescue Plan is a bolder, more progressive economic package than anything a Democratic president has proposed since L.B.J. But it is not, for now, a polarizing package. It's less polarizing even than Biden, who only polls at 12 percent among Republicans. You could chalk that up to its popular component parts, but the Affordable Care Act's individual policies were popular, too, and the bill polled at around 40 percent. You could say it's the coronavirus crisis, but coronavirus policy is sharply polarized. I

nal from any one Democratic leader is weaker, because he or she may not be the leader you care about. But no matter which kind of Democrat you are, Republicans blur in your mind into an undifferentiated mass of awful, so a signal from their political leaders is stronger. The process works the other way, too, of course. A recent Gallup poll showed 88 percent of Republicans disapprove of Biden — the more Biden makes the American Rescue Plan about himself, the more they'll hate it.

Then there's the book "Stealth Democracy," by the political scientists John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. They marshal a mountain of survey data to show that Americans have weak and changeable views on policy, but strong views on how politics should look and feel. Many, if not most, Americans believe "political conflict is unnecessary and an indication that something is wrong with governmental procedures," they write. The more partisan fighting there is around a bill, in other words, the more Americans begin to believe some-

It goes on. The White House just sent Congress the most ambitious immigration reform bill in years. It midwived a deal to get Merck to mobilize some of its factories to produce Johnson & Johnson's vaccine, and now Biden is saying there should be enough of a supply for every American adult to get vaccinated by the end of May. Imagine! The administration is also working on an infrastructure package that, if early reports bear out, will be the most transformational piece of climate policy — and perhaps economic policy — in my lifetime. Biden is blitzing.

This is roughly the opposite of how Donald Trump approached his presidency. Trump combined an always-on, say-anything, fight-anyone communications strategy with a curious void of legislative ambition. He backed congressional Republicans' unimaginative and ultimately doomed Obamacare repeal effort, and then signed a package of tax cuts tilted toward the wealthy. It was bog-standard, Paul Ryan-conservatism — nothing like the populist revolution Trump promised on the campaign trail. Trump signed plenty of executive orders, but when it came to the hard work of persuading others to do what he wanted, he typically checked out, or turned to Twitter.

Even so, Trump convinced many that he was a political genius whose shamelessness had allowed him to see what others had missed: You didn't win by being liked, you won by being all anyone ever talked about, even if they were cursing your name. "Very often my readers tried to persuade me there's no such thing as bad publicity, and Trump had proven that," Jay Rosen, a professor of journalism at N.Y.U., told me. "All that mattered was you were occupying space in the spectacle — not what was actually happening to you in that glare."

One rebuttal to that theory was always obvious. "Trump never got over 50 percent approval," Rosen says. "He's a widely hated man, a one-term president." For all the talk of Teflon Don, Trump paid a price for his antics and affronts and scandals. Bad publicity actually is bad publicity.

But another way of looking at it is that Trump's communication strategy was successful in getting Trump what he actually wanted: Attention, not legislation. Biden wants legislation, not attention, and that informs his team's more targeted approach. "You can be all over every newscast and insert yourself in every conversation, but if you aren't driving that conversation toward a focused agenda, it isn't doing you a lot of good," Kate Bedingfield, the White House communications director, told me.

So far, Biden's quieter strategy ap-

coronavirus policy is sharply polarized. I

If you can dial down the conflict, you can dial up the policy.

spect Biden's calmer approach to political communication is opening space for a bolder agenda.

A few pieces of political science research are shaping my thinking here. In 2012, Stephen Nicholson, a political scientist at the University of Georgia, published an interesting paper called "Polarizing Cues." In it, Nicholson asked people their opinions of proposed housing and immigration policies, sometimes telling them that Barack Obama supported the policy and at other times telling them that George W. Bush or John McCain supported the policy. What he found was that opinions didn't much change when people heard that a political leader from their own party supported a bill. But opinions changed dramatically when you told them a political leader from the other side supported a bill — it led to sharp swings against the legislation, no matter the underlying policy content.

When I called Nicholson to ask him about the paper, he gave an insightful explanation for the results. Humans tend to see diversity in the groups we belong to, and sameness in the groups we mistrust, he said. A Democrat knows there are many ways to be a Democrat — you can be a Biden Democrat, an A.O.C. Democrat, an Obama Democrat, a Bernie Democrat, a Clinton Democrat. So a sig-

there is around a bill, in other words, the more Americans begin to believe something must be wrong with the legislation — otherwise, why would everyone be so upset?

Mitch McConnell understood all of this, and he ginned up political bickering to undermine Obama's agenda. But Biden seems to understand it, too. When I talked to Bedingfield, she kept circling back to Biden's preference for rhetoric and strategies that turn down "the temperature" on American politics. But Biden isn't taking the usual Washington strategy toward that goal, which is to retreat to modest bills and quarter-measures. Instead, his theory seems to be that if you can dial down the conflict, you can dial up the policy.

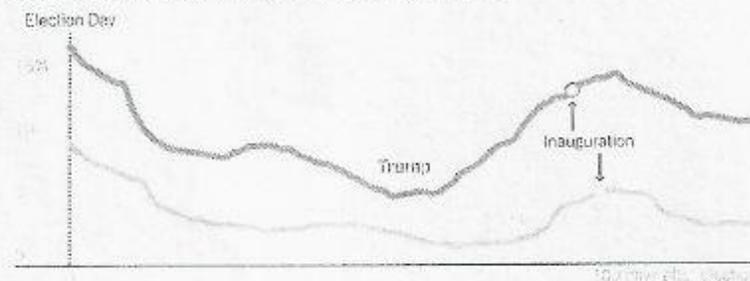
I've argued before that Biden's central insight in the campaign was that negative polarization — the degree to which we loathe the other side, even if we don't much like our side — is now the most powerful force in American politics. Biden often refused to do things that would endear him to his base, because those same things would drive Republicans wild. That strategy is carrying over to his presidency. And in part because of it, the reaction to his signature legislative package, which really is a collection of policies progressives have dreamed of for years, isn't cleaving along normal red-blue lines.

Like any other communications strategy, this will work until it doesn't. Biden will have his failures, as all presidents do. But for now, it's working, in defiance of the lessons many thought Trump's presidency taught.

Speak softly and pass a big agenda. It's at least worth a try. □

Compared to Trump in 2016, Biden has kept a low profile since his election

Share of news stories with "Trump" or "Biden" in the headline



Google search interest



Biden's infrastructure bill: Does it target what's needed?

President Biden's next legislative priority aims to be "far more transformative than his first," said Noah Smith in *Bloomberg.com*. Having signed the \$1.9 trillion Covid relief bill, Biden now proposes a \$2.3 trillion infrastructure bill that hearkens back to "the massive government investments of the New Deal" and the Eisenhower administration, and would reshape "the entire U.S. economy." Along with spending \$115 billion over 10 years to repair 20,000 highway miles and 10,000 bridges, the American Jobs Plan allocates \$165 billion for modernizing transit systems and building high-speed rail, \$80 billion for Amtrak upgrades and expansion, and \$174 billion for consumer rebates for electric vehicles and 500,000 charging stations. The bill would spend billions modernizing airports, water systems, and the electric grid. A recent poll found that 82 percent of Republican voters support repairing our crumbling infrastructure, said Catherine Rampell in *WashingtonPost.com*. "Astonishingly," not a single Republican senator supports this hugely popular bill.

"Infrastructure" does poll well, said Brian Riedl in *TheDispatch.com*, so Democrats "creatively branded" a "grab bag of liberal spending projects" under that misleading umbrella. Just a quarter or so of the bill actually covers transportation and utilities. Also included is \$100 billion to upgrade public school buildings, \$40 billion to improve public housing, \$213 billion to build and retrofit 2 million homes and commercial buildings for energy efficiency, and \$10 billion for a nebulous Civilian Climate Corps. "The largest single proposal" is \$400 billion for long-term home care for the elderly and disabled, which, "whatever its merits, has nothing to do with infrastructure." About 15 years ago, said Peggy Noonan in *The Wall Street Journal*, "politicians began promising big infrastructure bills," saying the work is "shovel-ready" and just needs cash. President Obama's projects got "tied up in permits, red tape, public hearings, environmental challenges," forcing him to admit, "There's no such thing as shovel-ready projects." So why is Biden repeating the same mistake?

Republicans oppose this bill for one principal reason, said Paul Krugman in *The New York Times*. "They want Biden to fail, just as they wanted President Obama to fail." In the 21st century, infrastructure is more than "steel and concrete." It's providing Americans with a foundation on which to succeed, whether that means removing lead pipes from our water supply systems or



A nation that could use some repair

spending \$100 billion to build high-speed, broadband internet networks. Biden's bill also includes funding for government fleets of electric vehicles, and upgrades to child-care centers and community colleges. It would devote \$180 billion to clean-energy research and development and provide \$16 billion to help fossil-fuel workers transition to new jobs, hiring them to plug oil and gas wells and reclaim abandoned coal mines. Is that "real" infrastructure? "Who cares?" It's all "productive investment in the nation's future."

Paid for by—you guessed it—"rich people and corporations," said Kevin Williamson in *NationalReview.com*. Biden wants to raise the corporate tax rate from 21 percent to 28 percent and increase the minimum tax on U.S. multinational corporations from 10.5 percent to 21 percent. Even some Democrats are balking at this binge of new taxation. Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, a moderate Democrat who wields enormous leverage in the 50-50 Senate, wants to set the corporate tax rate at 25 percent. In return for supporting Biden's tax-and-spend lollapalooza, four House Democrats from New York and New Jersey, "representing some of the most affluent suburban communities" in the U.S., "are demanding a tax cut for their constituents." They want Biden to repeal the Trump-era \$10,000 cap on state and local tax deductions from federal income tax liability. These SALT taxes raise tens of billions from "exactly the people Democrats are always saying should pay higher taxes: the well-off."

Trump himself "was extremely eager" to sign a sweeping infrastructure bill like this one, said Jonathan Chait in *NYMag.com*. But his administration's "infrastructure week" became a running joke after Senate Republicans ruled out any option to finance it. The GOP's nonsensical position on rebuilding the country is: "No paying for it with taxes, and no paying for it with debt." Democrats may not need GOP support to pass this bill, said Ella Nilsen in *Vox.com*. While most bills require 60 votes to overcome a filibuster, the Senate parliamentarian ruled this week that Democrats could pass additional legislation this year through budget reconciliation, which they used last month to pass the coronavirus relief bill with just 50 votes. If that happens, the White House will justify a party-line vote by citing 2-to-1 support among all Americans for the bill: "Infrastructure is bipartisan, even if congressional Republicans don't support it."

Corporations: Bezos joins call for higher taxes

The Biden administration's plan to raise corporate taxes drew support this week from an unlikely figure, said David Shephardson in *Reuters.com*. Amazon chief executive Jeff Bezos said the company endorses Biden's proposal to increase the corporate tax rate to 28 percent from 21 percent, and "close loopholes that allow companies to move profits overseas." Amazon's concession comes after it received "withering criticism" from the White House for paying no federal income tax in 2017 or 2018, despite billions in profit. Bezos's endorsement of a tax hike puts him at odds with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which said the proposal would "slow the economic recovery."



Bezos: Amazon is willing to pay more

Many business groups still miss that Americans don't want to hear complaints from businesses that have "gorged themselves on tax cuts," said Jennifer Rubin in *The Washington Post*. Last week, the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy found 55 corporations that made a total of \$40.5 billion paid \$0 in federal income taxes last year. Some household names—Nike and FedEx among them—haven't paid taxes since 2017. Despite a raft of federal handouts, corporate tax revenues since the 2017 tax cuts have been \$40 billion lower than projected, while wages grew just 2 percent compared with 2.9 percent growth rate of GDP. The public knows it's time for these companies to "foot the bill."

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Ghost Guns Explained: What Are They and Why Are They an Issue?

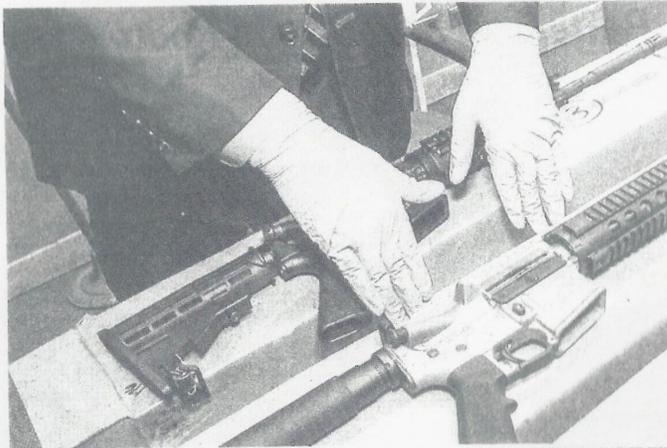
By ANNIE KARNI

WASHINGTON — Facing Republican opposition to the passage of gun control legislation, President Biden on Thursday announced a set of initial steps he could take on his own to address the epidemic of gun violence.

The most significant proposal was a crackdown on the proliferation of so-called ghost guns, or firearms that are assembled from kits and do not carry serial numbers.

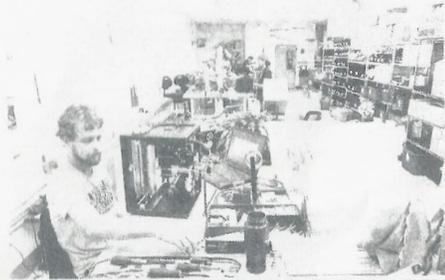
"I want to see these kits treated as firearms under the Gun Control Act," Mr. Biden said.

Here's what you need to know about the weapons the Biden administration is targeting and why.



HAVEN DALEY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ghost guns are made in parts, do not have serial numbers and can be assembled at home.



LYNDIA M. GONZALEZ/AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Many ghost guns are sold online as D.I.Y. kits, and there is no need to pass a background check to obtain the components.

ble — under current rules, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives does not treat them as it would traditional firearms.

How hard are they to assemble?

It's easy and relatively inexpensive.

According to a report by Everytown for Gun Safety, a gun violence prevention organization, an AR-15 build kit costs as low as \$345.

The sales pitches usually promise little work for the buyer. One online purveyor assured that "building time doesn't take too long," adding, "Within an hour or two, you should be breaking it in at

the range."

The kits usually come with directions on how to finish the gun or link to YouTube tutorials. Typically, the only tool needed is a drill and the kits are often sold with the necessary drill bits.

Many ghost guns are also sold with a jig, which fits around the frame or receiver and helps turn the project into something like "gun assembly for dummies." One site said the jig could be used to complete a gun "in under 15 minutes with excellent results."

According to Everytown for Gun Safety, the top five instructional videos on YouTube for building a ghost gun have drawn more than three million views.

Are ghost guns new?

No, but they are a growing problem. Even though kits to assemble guns have been sold since the 1990s, the market did not really take off until around 2009. At the time, firearm sellers in California began offering unfinished receivers for the AR-15 and AK-47 series of guns, in an attempt to circumvent the state's assault weapons laws, according to T. Christian Heyne, the vice president for policy at the Brady United Against Gun Violence organization.

The problem of ghost guns did not become well known until 2013, when one was linked to a shooting at Santa Monica College in California, which killed six people, in-

cluding the gunman.

Sales started to rise substantially around 2016, as people began buying kits to recreate a firearm based on the Glock 9-millimeter semiautomatic pistol.

How prevalent are they?

There is no way to know how many ghost guns are in circulation because they do not have serial numbers and no background check is required to purchase them.

But data shows that their prevalence appears to be growing every year, especially in states like California that have strict gun laws.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, or A.T.F., law enforcement recovered about 10,000 ghost guns in 2019. In cities, those numbers are rising at what the authorities say is an alarming rate every year. Proponents of stricter gun laws have been pushing for action on ghost guns to address the growing problem before it be-

comes a full-blown catastrophe.

In Philadelphia, for instance, 250 ghost guns were recovered in 2020, from 99 in 2019. In Baltimore, 126 ghost guns were recovered last year, up from 29 in 2019.

"Forty-one percent, so almost half our cases we're coming across, are these 'ghost guns,'" Carlos A. Canino, the special agent in charge of the A.T.F. Los Angeles field division, told ABC News last year.

Is there a link to mass shootings?

Some mass shootings have been linked to ghost guns, including one at a high school in California in 2019, when a 16-year-old killed two students. A ghost gun was also linked to a 2017 rampage in which a man killed his wife and four others in Northern California.

But analysts said ghost guns were not disproportionately linked to mass shootings. The bigger issue is that they are disproportionately affecting day-to-day gun violence in communities of color. *gun safety groups said*

Poll: Newsom recall would fail

Voters approve job he's doing, oppose bid to oust him

By Joe Garofoli

Gov. Gavin Newsom would easily defeat an attempt to recall him if the election were held today, as many Californians are optimistic that the worst of the coronavirus pandemic is behind them and believe the governor is doing a good job, a new poll indicates.

The poll of likely voters found that 56% oppose removing Newsom from office while 40% back the recall, according to the non-

partisan Public Policy Institute of California. That's almost as wide a margin as in the 2018 governor's race in which Newsom defeated John Cox, one of the Republicans who has declared himself as a replacement candidate in a recall election that is likely to be held later this year.

The survey "is good news for Newsom," said Mark Baldasare, the institute's president and CEO. "The burden of proof (to recall Newsom) is on the people who brought this before

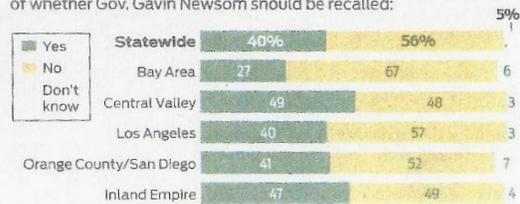
voters, and they haven't moved that level of support much since 2018."

The Republican-backed recall effort does have the support of 79% of likely GOP voters, the poll found. But few others have joined them. Not only are Democrats overwhelmingly opposed, but just 42% of independents support ousting Newsom, according to the survey.

Newsom's job approval rating among likely voters is 53%, vir-

Newsom recall poll

Percentage results statewide and by region to the question of whether Gov. Gavin Newsom should be recalled:



Note: The poll of 1,174 likely voters in California was conducted March 14-23 in English and Spanish and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.9 percentage points. Numbers may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Source: Public Policy Institute of California

Corporate leaders, GOP battle over election laws

What happened

Republicans found themselves in a showdown this week with Coca-Cola, Major League Baseball, and other corporations who've taken a stand against Georgia's controversial new voting law, with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell accusing them of caving to "far-left mobs" and warning them to "stay out of politics." Major League Baseball sent shock waves through Georgia last week when it pulled the All-Star Game from Atlanta to protest the sweeping new law, which requires ID for absentee voting, restricts drop boxes, outlaws third parties from giving food or water to voters in polling lines, and gives the Republican-controlled legislature more authority to intervene in elections. The league "fundamentally supports voting rights for all Americans," said MLB commissioner Rob Manfred, who faced strong pressure from players and civil rights groups. Two of the state's largest corporations, Delta Airlines and Coca-Cola, denounced the law, and dozens of other companies, including American Express and Citigroup, issued critical statements. "Let me be crystal clear," said Coca-Cola CEO James Quincey. "This legislation is unacceptable."

Republicans warned business leaders to butt out of the dispute, with McConnell threatening "serious consequences" if they "keep dabbling in behaving like a woke parallel government." He said CEOs are being swayed by disingenuous efforts to misrepresent a law that would actually expand voter access to the polls. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott said he would no longer throw out the opening pitch at the Texas Rangers' opening game, and several Republican senators called for revoking the antitrust exemption that classifies MLB as a sport rather than a business. Meanwhile, the Georgia House voted to revoke a Delta jet fuel tax break.

Nearly 200 companies signed a statement opposing the Georgia law and similar bills pending in dozens of other states. "Corporations have to stand up—there is no middle ground," said former American Express CEO Ken Chenault.

What the editorials said

Major League Baseball has taken "a giant step in the right direction," said *The Boston Globe*. Now it's time for other corporate leaders to "step up with more than words and good intentions." The intent of Georgia's law "was hardly a secret": Republicans were horrified at the huge Democratic turnout that cost them two Senate seats and gave Joe Biden the state's presidential electors. Dozens of other GOP-led states are looking to Georgia's law as a model. But "economic clout is a powerful weapon," and "so is public shaming."



Demonstrators at the Georgia State Capitol

What the columnists said

"This is what it looks like when a political party turns against democracy," said Jamelle Bouie in *The New York Times*. The new law may not be as blatant as Jim Crow laws, but it follows the same playbook: "placing burdens on specific groups of voters" in a manner that's "inescapably racial." Cutting in half the period for requesting an absentee ballot, adding ID requirements, and limiting drop-box availability in cities are efforts to squelch Democratic votes, and to pretend otherwise is to ignore the reason Republicans passed them: "because their party lost an election."

Enabling more people to cast ballots is not necessarily a good thing, said Kevin Williamson in *NationalReview.com*. Why wouldn't the country "be better served by having fewer—but better—voters?" Yes, ID requirements put a burden on voters. "So what?" We expect everyone to pay their taxes, so why not to maintain a valid ID? "Genuine majority rule" is to be feared, because average voters "very often are contentedly ignorant."

Calling the law "Jim Crow on steroids," as President Biden did, "certainly overstates the case," said Zack Beauchamp in *Vox.com*. But it really does enable Republican legislators "to handpick the people in charge of disqualifying ballots in Democratic-leaning

places like Atlanta." Moreover, the law's "very existence" is "predicated on a lie about voter fraud that is corroding American democracy"—one that has 60 percent of Republicans wrongly believing Donald Trump was robbed of the presidency.

As the debate over voting rules rages, corporate leaders find themselves in "a head-spinning new landscape," said David Gelles in *The New York Times*. On one side are Democrats and activists "focused on social justice," who demand they take a stand. On the other are "populist Republicans who are suddenly unafraid to break ties with business"—and retaliate against "companies that cross them politically." Caught in between, companies like Coca-Cola and Delta "face steep political consequences no matter what they do."

What next?

Texas is shaping up as the next voting rights battleground, said Sam Levine in *The Guardian.com*. Last week, Texas Republicans advanced legislation that would limit early voting hours and prohibit drive-through and 24-hour voting, among other new restrictions. Texas-based American Airlines and Dell Technologies have lined up against the measure. "Governments should ensure citizens have their voices heard," tweeted Dell CEO Michael Dell. Battles over new voting laws loom in Arizona and Florida as well, said Adam Brewster and Caitlin Huey-Burns in *CBSNews.com*. Bills moving forward in Arizona would add ID requirements for absentee voters and shrink the number of voters who automatically get sent ballots. In Florida, Republicans are pushing measures to tighten absentee voting by eliminating drop boxes, adding ID requirements, and prohibiting "anyone but an immediate family member" from returning a ballot. Nationwide, at least 55 bills to restrict voting access "are currently moving through the legislature in 24 states."

Biden Orders Panel's Review On Expanding Supreme Court

By MICHAEL D. SHEAR and CARL HULSE

WASHINGTON — President Biden on Friday ordered a 180-day study of adding seats to the Supreme Court, making good on a campaign-year promise to establish a bipartisan commission to examine the potentially explosive subjects of expanding the court or setting term limits for justices.

The president acted under pressure from activists pushing for more seats to alter the ideological balance of the court after President Donald J. Trump appointed three justices, including one to a seat that Republicans had blocked his predecessor, Barack Obama, from filling for almost a year.

The result is a court with a stronger conservative tilt, now 6 to 3, after the addition of Mr. Trump's choices, including Justice Amy Coney Barrett, who was confirmed to replace Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg just days before last year's presidential election.

But while Mr. Biden, a former chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has asserted that the system of judicial nominations is "getting out of whack," he has declined to say whether he supports altering the size of the court or making other changes — like imposing term limits — to the current system of lifetime appointments.

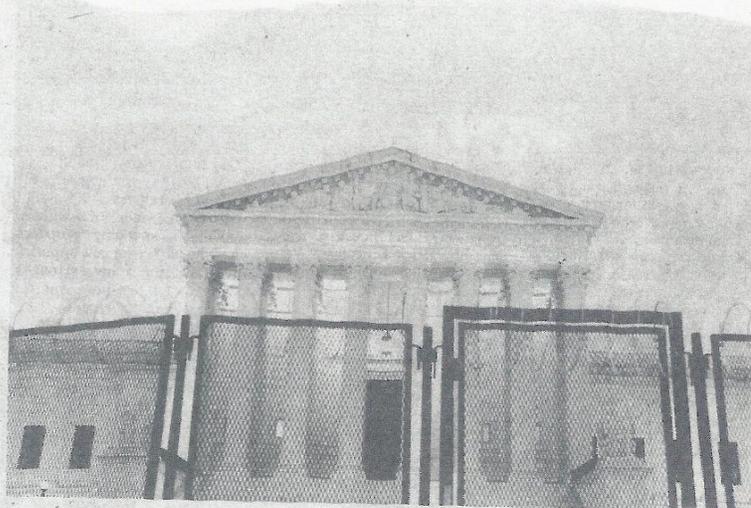
It is not clear that the commission established by Mr. Biden will by itself clarify his position. Under the White House order establishing it, the commission is not set to issue specific recommendations at the end of its study — an outcome that is likely to disappoint activists.

In his executive order on Friday, the president created a 36-member commission charged with examining the history of the court, past changes to the process of nominating justices, and the potential consequences to altering the size of the nation's highest court.

The panel will be led by Bob Bauer, who served as White House counsel for Mr. Obama, and Cristina Rodriguez, a Yale Law School professor who served as deputy assistant attorney general in the Office of Legal Counsel under Mr. Obama.

Progressives say that Republicans unfairly gained an advantage on the court by blocking Mr. Obama's nomination of Judge Merrick B. Garland in 2016, and they see adding seats to the court, setting term limits or instituting other changes as a way to offset the power of any one president to influence its makeup. Conservatives have denounced the effort as "court-packing" similar to the failed effort by Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s.

The issue of whether to alter the



STEFANI REYNOLDS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A team of 36 will consider changes to the Supreme Court, but won't make recommendations.

size of the court, which has been set at nine members since just after the Civil War, is highly charged, particularly when Congress is almost evenly divided between the two parties. An attempt by Mr. Biden to increase the number of justices would require approval of Congress and would be met by fierce opposition.

The commission is intended to provide a forum to debate the issue that is protected from the passions that will continue to rage in the political arena, according to people familiar with Mr. Biden's intentions.

The president understands, they said, that changes to the size of the court, or limitations on the length of time that a justice can serve, would be "reforms for the ages" that would have far-reaching implications for the courts for decades, not just during Mr. Biden's time in office.

During his campaign for president, activists urged Mr. Biden to promise that he would expand the court as a way of countering the conservative mark that Mr. Trump was able to put on the institution. In addition to Justice Barrett, Mr. Trump also appointed Justices Brett M. Kavanaugh and Neil M. Gorsuch.

"There's growing recognition that the Supreme Court poses a danger to the health and well-being of the nation and even to democracy itself," said Aaron Belkin, the director of the group Take Back the Court. "A White House judicial reform commission has a historic opportunity to explain the gravity of the threat and to help contain it by urging Congress to add seats, which is the only way to restore balance to the court."

Mr. Biden has refused to clarify his view on the issue and instead, in an interview on "60 Minutes" in October, promised to create a commission.

"I will ask them to, over 180 days, come back to me with recommendations as to how to reform the court system, because

it's getting out of whack," he told Norah O'Donnell of CBS News.

Mr. Biden may get his own chance to shape the court this year if Justice Stephen G. Breyer retires at the end of the current term. Justice Breyer, 82, is the oldest member of its three-justice liberal wing. Progressive groups are becoming increasingly aggressive in demanding that he step aside while Democrats still control the Senate and the confirmation process.

But Justice Breyer warned this week that efforts to expand the court for political reasons could undermine the trust that the public has in the court and the decisions that it makes on important issues.

"I hope and expect that the court will retain its authority," he said. "But that authority, like the rule of law, depends on trust, a trust that the court is guided by legal principle, not politics. Structural alteration motivated by the perception of political influence can only feed that perception, further eroding that trust."

Activists who say a larger court would give Mr. Biden the chance to appoint a number of liberal justices may be disappointed by his commission. People familiar with its charge from the president said the group will avoid making any recommendations to Mr. Biden or lawmakers.

Instead, the panel of scholars, lawyers, political scientists and former judges will produce a research paper designed to be an authoritative analysis of the issue. The goal, the people said, is not to settle on an answer, but to provide Mr. Biden, members of Congress and the public an evaluation of the risks and benefits of making changes to the court.

In a statement, the White House said the commission would examine "the genesis of the reform debate and the court's role in the constitutional system; the length of service and turnover of justices

on the court; the membership and size of the court; and the court's case selection, rules, and practices."

The commission's members include liberal scholars like Laurence H. Tribe, a professor emeritus at Harvard Law School and a leading progressive voice in the legal community, and Caroline Fredrickson, the former president of the American Constitution Society.

But progressives may balk at some of the conservative members of the commission. They include Jack Goldsmith, a Harvard Law School professor who was a top Justice Department official under President George W. Bush; Adam White, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and a professor at George Mason University's Antonin Scalia Law School; and Keith E. Whittington, a professor of politics at Princeton University who takes an "originalist" view of the Constitution.

People familiar with Mr. Biden's selections for the commission said they expected some members to offer evidence promoting the benefits of making changes to the court, while others would emphasize the costs or consequences of altering the current method of selecting justices. Those discussions will be presented in the report, which is set to be finished in October.

In his order, Mr. Biden instructed the commission to hold public hearings on the issue and to accept testimony and submissions from other legal experts, organizations and members of the public who want to weigh in.

Among the questions that he wants answered: How should the strengths and weaknesses of proposals to expand the court be evaluated? Would expansion require other reforms, such as the creation of a panel system for sitings? How does the history of efforts to expand or contract the size of the court bear on the questions being debated?

Vaccine passports: A ticket to freedom—or tyranny?

Vaccine passports “don’t even exist yet” but have already become the latest flashpoint in the culture wars, said Molly Roberts in *The Washington Post*. With more than 100 million Americans now vaccinated against Covid-19, several states and private software companies are developing smartphone apps and paper certificates that would let vaccinated people enter “bars, ballparks, and other businesses” with some confidence that their fellow customers aren’t disease vectors shedding coronavirus. Like face masks before it, proof of vaccination is demonized by right-wing politicians and media as a dangerous liberal assault on liberty. The passport proposals “smack of 1940s Nazi Germany,” said Rep. Madison Cawthorn (R-N.C.). Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene called passports “Biden’s Mark of the Beast.” Despite this “silly foaming at the mouth,” said Mariel Garza in the *Los Angeles Times*, the Biden administration has explicitly ruled out issuing a federal vaccination mandate or a passport. Instead, it’s several states and private businesses that are working together to develop scannable proof of vaccination. But Florida’s lib-trolling Gov. Ron DeSantis and Texas Gov. Greg Abbott immediately banned private businesses in their states from requiring proof of vaccination. Vaccine passports would certainly speed up our return to normal life—but demagogues on the Right see them as another tool to keep their base “angry and afraid.”

Fear is warranted, said Michael Brendan Dougherty in *National Review.com*. Vaccination and natural immunity from prior coronavirus infection will soon mean that new Covid cases will “drop precipitously,” so this unnecessary “bio-surveillance regime” would serve only to turn vaccine skeptics into “scapegoats” who couldn’t work, travel, shop, or enter public places. Many liberals would



A digital passport under development

welcome that “revenge.” Though I’m a libertarian, I reluctantly favor passports, said Megan McArdle in *The Washington Post*. The unvaccinated will impose a serious cost on the rest of us by “creating a reservoir of disease that can spread” and mutate, rendering our vaccines less effective and perhaps requiring a new round of vaccinations. Still, we must provide exceptions for people who can’t get vaccinated for legitimate health reasons. A free society should be wary of setting conditions for “participating in public life.”

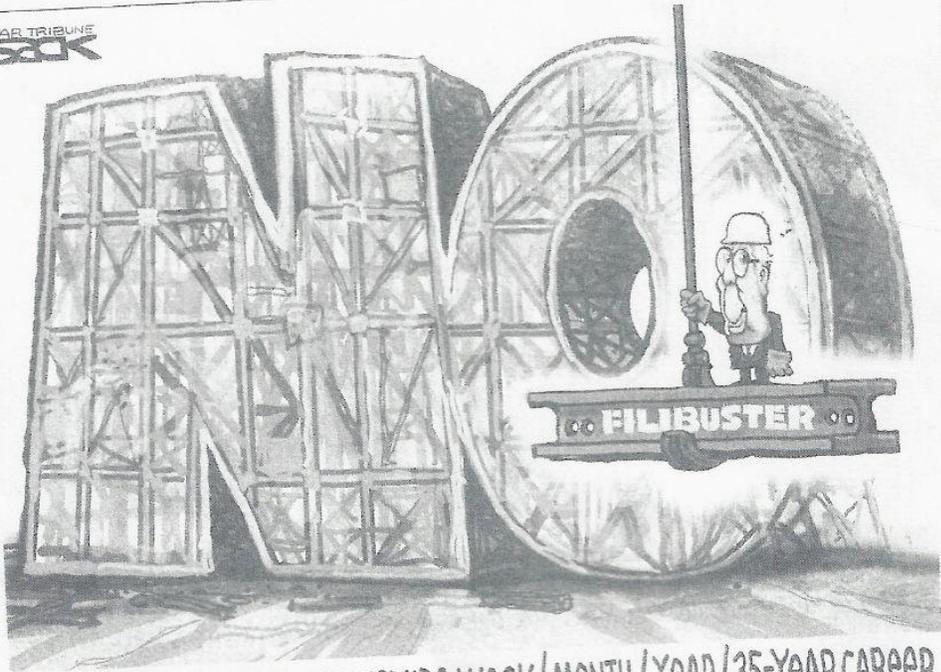
We impose such conditions all the time, said Paul Waldman in *WashingtonPost.com*. Children and teens cannot attend schools or camps or colleges without proving they’ve been injected with “a range of vaccines.” If you want to drive a car, we make you take a test, carry a license, and show it to police if stopped. Somehow our republic has survived these impositions without collapsing into an Orwellian dystopia, so I think we can probably handle “getting your smartphone scanned on your way into the gym.”

Besides, said Anthony Fisher in *BusinessInsider.com*, wasn’t it always a core Republican belief that private businesses have the right to choose their customers? When a Christian baker refuses to cater a gay wedding, conservatives applaud. But if that same baker refuses admission to “people who can’t prove they don’t pose a risk for spreading a virus that’s killed over 550,000 Americans,” suddenly he’s an enemy of liberty? The libertarian-conservative position on passports is “incoherent,” said columnist Will Wilkinson in *ModelCitizen.substack.com*. No unvaccinated person has the right to “pose a risk to the health of the entire community.” Let’s call the passport hysteria what it is: “Blatantly self-serving tribalism.”

Proof of immunity

Should private businesses require customers to have vaccine passports?





MITCH McCONNELL INFRASTRUCTURE WEEK/MONTH/YEAR/35-YEAR CAREER

'V' Signs~A Brief History...



VICTORY

PEACE

VACCINATED

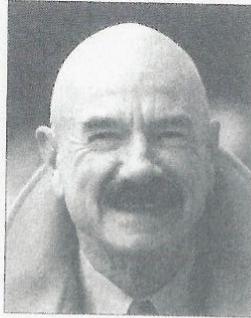
The operative who masterminded the Watergate break-in

G. Gordon Liddy
1930–2021

If G. Gordon Liddy had any regrets about his key role in a scandal that earned him a 20-year prison sentence and brought down a president, he kept them well hidden. As an operative for Richard Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign, it was Liddy who hatched a plan to plant bugs in the Democratic Party headquarters at the Watergate complex. And it was Liddy who helped direct a pair of break-ins at the complex, the second of which ended with the burglars in handcuffs. An intense figure with a bushy mustache whom Nixon deemed "a little nuts"—Liddy liked to demonstrate his toughness by holding his hand over a candle flame until the skin burned—he refused to testify at either his subsequent criminal trial or the Watergate hearings, saying he wasn't "a rat." After leaving prison, Liddy embraced his notoriety, playing TV villains and driving around Washington in a black Volvo with the license plate H20GATE. "I'd do it again for my president," he said.

Growing up in Hoboken, N.J., Liddy was "a fearful boy with respiratory problems who learned to steel himself with tests of will power," said *The New York Times*. He lifted weights, performed the candle trick, and said he overcame his fear of rats by roasting and eating one. He also "decapitated chickens for a neighbor until he could kill like a soldier"—without "emotion or thought," he later wrote. Following in his lawyer father's footsteps, Liddy attended a Catholic prep school and then Fordham University. After graduating, he joined the Army "with hopes of fighting in Korea, but was assigned to an anti-aircraft radar unit in Brooklyn."

Liddy returned to Fordham for a law degree and joined the FBI in 1957, said *The Washington Post*. After stints as a field agent and a supervisor of crime records in Washington, D.C., he left the agency



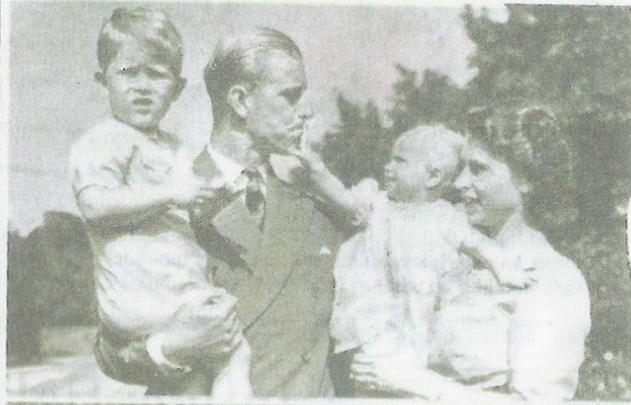
in 1962 to work "in patent law for his father's firm" and then as a prosecutor in New York's Dutchess County in 1966. "He became a local conservative folk hero" for engineering a bust of LSD guru Timothy Leary, and ran unsuccessfully for Congress. In 1968, Liddy helped organize the Nixon-Agnew campaign in New York state and "was rewarded with a post as special assistant to the secretary of the treasury," working on narcotics and gun control.

He soon moved to the White House, where he headed "the plumbers," a covert team charged with stopping press leaks "embarrassing to the Nixon administration,"

said the Associated Press. That led to a role on Nixon's re-election committee, where he hatched outrageous plots such as "kidnapping war protest organizers and taking them to Mexico," hiring prostitutes to entrap Democrats, and assassinating a syndicated columnist—a job Liddy proposed to do himself. Most were rejected, but not his scheme to bug the Democratic headquarters.

Found guilty of conspiracy, burglary, and illegal wiretapping, Liddy served 52 months before President Jimmy Carter commuted his sentence in 1977. Out of prison, he "repackaged himself as a showman," said the *Los Angeles Times*. He wrote novels and a memoir and launched an acting career, "playing a recurring bad-guy role on *Miami Vice*." In 1992, Liddy began hosting a popular syndicated radio show on which he "swung from a matter-of-fact reading of the daily news to bombastic outbursts." His passionate embrace of guns and lambasting of liberals made him a darling "of America's extreme right," said *The Times* (U.K.). In later years he took up motorcycle riding and parachute jumping, and "promoted nutritional supplements." He remained grateful for what Watergate had done to rescue him from obscurity. "I'm very appreciative," he said in 1991. "I was an accident of history."

Prince Philip, Consort to Britain's Queen, Dies at 99



ROYAL: Prince Philip, Queen Elizabeth II's husband of 74 years, was a constant presence at her side. Clockwise from left: the prince in 2011; with the queen and two children, Prince Charles and Princess Anne, in 1951; and as a naval officer

Queen's Husband Was the Longest-Serving Consort

BY MAX COLCHESTER
AND JEANNE WHALEN

LONDON—Prince Philip, a constant presence at the side of Queen Elizabeth II and the longest-serving consort to a monarch in British history, has died. He was 99.

"The Royal Family join with people around the world in mourning his loss," the family said.

Prince Philip recently had been hospitalized for treatment on a pre-existing heart condition. He was discharged in March after a month following an operation.

OBITUARY
PRINCE PHILIP
1921-2021

Born a prince of Greece and Denmark on the island of Corfu in 1921, he married the queen—then still Princess Elizabeth—in 1947, when he was 26 and she was 21. They were third cousins, both descended from Queen Victoria.

Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, spent much of his adult life walking a step or two behind his wife, accompanying her to state dinners, garden parties and charitable events. Behind the scenes, he was credited with working to push the monarchy to be more open and accessible to the British public. He was also affiliated with some 800 organizations, including numerous charities.

Prince Philip carried out his public duties until August 2017, when he made his final official appearance at a Royal Marine parade at Buckingham Palace. Known for his sometimes outspoken remarks,

Prince Philip treated his role as consort as an act of duty above anything else.

"It's the customer that needs to be satisfied, not me," he said during a documentary of his life, aired around his 90th birthday. "I don't do it for my own amusement."

Though he was born into a royal family, Prince Philip had a relatively rough childhood. While he was still an infant, a Greek revolutionary court sentenced his father, Prince Andrew, to banishment for life for disobeying a military order during a battle with Turkey. That forced the family of seven to flee the country, according to "Young Prince Philip," a biography by Philip Eade.

They lived an "impoverished" life in exile in a house provided by a relative on the outskirts of Paris, according to "The Queen: Elizabeth II and the Monarchy," a biography by Ben Pimlott.

Prince Philip's father effectively abandoned the family when the prince was 9, and his mother suffered a nervous breakdown and spent many years in mental-health clinics. Prince Philip eventually went to live with relatives in England. He was sent to boarding school at Gordonstoun in Scotland.

After his school years he attended the Royal Naval College in the seaside town of Dartmouth. It was there that he met the future queen, during a visit by the royal family in 1939.

In 1940 Prince Philip joined the Royal Navy, serving with distinction in World War II in the Mediterranean and the Pacific. During a 1941 battle off



JOHN GREEN/PA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

Members of the royal family including Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, gathered on the balcony of Buckingham Palace in 2013.

Covid Restrictions Will Limit Funeral

LONDON—The death of Prince Philip while the U.K. remains in the grip of Covid-19 poses a question: How do you hold a funeral befitting a prince during a pandemic?

Funerals of British royals often are large affairs brimming with pomp and ceremony that give the public a chance to pay their respects.

the coast of Greece, his skillful manning of his ship's searchlight helped his crew sink two Italian cruisers in five minutes, Mr. Pimlott writes. In 1942, at the age of 21, he was one of the youngest officers ever named first lieutenant and second-in-command of a destroyer.

He began wooing Princess Elizabeth in earnest toward the end of the war, reportedly at the encouragement of his ambitious uncle, Louis Mountbatten, who became a sort of father figure to him in his teenage years—and who was

Full details of the funeral arrangements of Prince Philip, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh, have yet to be published by Buckingham Palace.

The ceremony will be closely watched, not least to see whether the prince's grandson Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan Markle—who have distanced themselves from the royal family and now live in the U.S.—attend the funeral.

Covid-19 restrictions in place at least until June mean a maximum of 30 people can

attend a funeral, and large gatherings outdoors aren't allowed, limiting both the number who can attend the service and the scale and duration of any public aspects of the ceremony.

Buckingham Palace said Friday that in light of the pandemic, modified funeral and ceremonial arrangements are being considered. The palace asked the public not to gather in crowds, and said a book of condolence is open online for people to leave messages.

—Jason Douglas

will be fondly remembered as a constant in the life of our Queen."

Prince Philip rarely spoke in public, but when he did he became famous for controversial and offensive remarks. At one of the queen's summer garden parties, he remarked to a woman in a wheelchair, "At least you get to sit down through the whole thing."

Shortly after being made president of the World Wildlife Fund in the U.K. in 1961, he attended a tiger hunt in India.

In private, Philip and Elizabeth were like any elderly couple, biographer Sarah Bradford said. "If the queen wanted to give the corgis tea and biscuits and they were roaming around the floor being a nuisance, he would shout and she would pay no attention," Ms. Bradford said. "He was the only man in the world who could treat her as an ordinary woman."

During her Diamond Jubilee in 2012, Queen Elizabeth called Prince Philip her "constant strength and guide."

He died the oldest-ever male member of the British royal family.

killed by a bomb on his boat in Ireland in 1979.

Around the time of his marriage to Elizabeth in 1947, Prince Philip became a naturalized British citizen and was named Duke of Edinburgh.

When Elizabeth became queen in 1952, Prince Philip gave up his active naval career for full-time royal duties, serving as his wife's consort and as patron to charitable organizations. Asked about his life in a 1992 interview, he betrayed some regret about the trade-offs. "I didn't want to be president of

the World Wildlife Fund," he said. "I'd much rather have stayed in the navy, frankly."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson paid tribute to Prince Philip and highlighted his work on behalf of numerous charities and his advocacy of the environment. "Prince Philip earned the affection of generations here in the United Kingdom, across the Commonwealth and around the world," he said.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Prince Philip was "a man of great purpose and conviction. He

Gene Mullin

April 21, 1937 - April 5, 2021

Gene Mullin passed peacefully at his home on April 5, 2021 in the company of his immediate family. A native of San Francisco born to the late Eugene A. and Ruth Mullin, he was predeceased in 2017 by his loving wife of 52 years, Terri, and by his dear sister, Linda Parrish, in 2020. He is survived by his children, Jennifer Fisher (David) and Kevin Mullin (Jessica), and five grandsons: Austin, Jonathan and Colton Fisher, Liam and Landon Mullin. He leaves behind many nieces, nephews and other family members who will miss him dearly.

He was a third-generation Californian, born in 1937, and he graduated from Riordan High School and the University of San Francisco. He was honored by Riordan in 2010 as its first Alumnus of the Year, representing the 1950s, and by USF's School of Education as its Alumnus of the Year in 2011. Gene taught social studies at South San Francisco High School for 32 years, being named San Mateo County Teacher of the Year in 1991. He also coached basketball for two decades, and taught a summer program at Sacramento State University for more than ten years. He was active in the California Teachers Association for more than 30 years, and served as President of the SSF CTA. He co-authored several books on local government, co-wrote educational videos on a variety of social science topics, and frequently contributed opinion pieces to the local press. He was a six year veteran of the US Army Reserves.

In his 40 year political career, he was a two-term Council member and twice Mayor of South San Francisco, and a three-term member of the California State Assembly (2002-2008) where, among other assignments, he chaired the Assembly Education Committee. He was fondly referred to as the "Cal Ripkin of the Assembly", as he was the only member to never miss a scheduled committee hearing or floor session during his entire Sacramento tenure. He was named Legislator of the Year by over two dozen organizations while in Sacramento.

While Gene was well known as a teacher, coach, distinguished public servant



and community leader, he held a fascinating array of jobs earlier in his career. He was a dealer, shill and lifeguard at Cal-Neva Lodge at stateline Lake Tahoe, a joke writer for Phyllis Diller when she appeared at Cal-Neva, and a golf caddy for Joe Kennedy (JFK and RFK's father). He spent time as a ticket agent with Southern Pacific Railroad, a vendor at Kezar Stadium, a brick cleaner, and a private investigator reviewing FBI files, including a case involving the Playboy trademark. He even did a stint opening Willie Mays' mail and responding on Willie's behalf.

Gene treasured spending time with his family and his many friends (who occasionally acknowledged his sardonic wit), enjoyed hosting annual gatherings for more than two decades of his fishing group - The Friends of Joe - as well as his annual retired teachers cohorts. He was proud of his 12+ gallon donation to the Peninsula Blood Bank. He and Terri always enjoyed family vacations at their cabins at the Russian River and Lake Tahoe.

Over the years, he was a board member of many community non-profits, including the San Mateo County Historical Society, Ability Path, HIP Housing, the SSF Library Foundation, BayBio, Families on Track, and Seton Medical Center, and he was on the advisory committee for many others.

We'd like to give special thanks to family friend Dr. Dave Caro for his counsel and care in Gene's final months.

Funeral services private. Gene will be inurned in the family plot at Holy Cross Cemetery. Contributions in memory of Gene may be made to the South San Francisco Community Learning Center via the SSF Library Foundation at <https://www.ssfsgives.org/donate>.

Prince's Death Marks New Chapter for British Monarchy

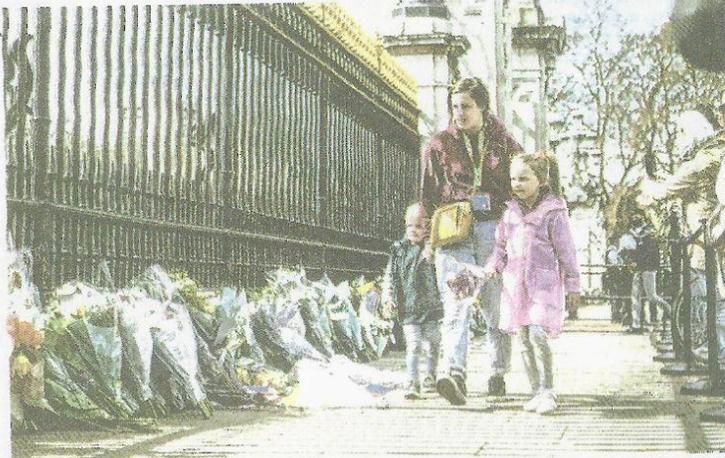
By Max Colchester

LONDON—The death of Prince Philip, Queen Elizabeth's husband of 74 years, is emblematic of a generational shift in the royal family and Britain as a whole, and comes at an already unsettled time for the House of Windsor.

A U.K. flag flying at half-staff Friday over Buckingham Palace signified the prince's passing and the end of a chapter of continuity for the monarchy, highlighting uncertainty about the institution's future.

While Queen Elizabeth, 94 years old, continues to reign, she is gradually delegating jobs and power to her less popular son, Prince Charles, and her grandson Prince William. Meanwhile, the royal family is being buffeted. A rift with Prince Harry, her other grandson, is straining a once-tight family unit, after he alleged racism in the royal ranks. Also, Prince Andrew, the queen's second son, had to step back from royal duties because of his ties to a now-deceased sex offender.

Royal watchers said it is unlikely Queen Elizabeth



People gathered in front of Buckingham Palace in London on Friday to pay respects to Prince Philip.

would step back from her duties following her husband's death. She has said being monarch is a job for life.

Three years ago, the queen said Prince Charles should succeed her as the head of the Commonwealth, a club of nations that were mostly part of

the British Empire.

"There could be a soft regency where she fulfills fewer of the royal functions herself," says Robert Hazell, professor of government and the constitution at University College London. "She has in effect already started to do that."

Support for the monarchy is high in Britain and there is no public appetite for becoming a republic, so the monarchy as an institution is safe, Mr. Hazell said.

However, support for Prince Charles is much less than for the queen. Currently, 40% of

Britons think Prince William should succeed to the throne instead of Prince Charles when Queen Elizabeth dies, according to research company YouGov.

In recent years, Prince Charles, a vocal activist on matters ranging from the environment to architecture, has pushed his vision for a smaller working royal family focused around the ruling monarch and his or her direct heirs.

That vision contributed to the inadvertent expulsion of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. The couple quit frontline royalty to live in California, where they are pursuing their own business venture.

The loss of two of the monarchy's most competent performers has been a blow, officials said. Moreover, relations between the couple and the rest of the family have soured.

The couple changed the home page of their nonprofit Archewell's site on Friday to pay tribute to Prince Philip. "In loving memory of His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh 1921-2021. Thank you for your service...You will be greatly missed."

Nonetheless, the public's affection for the royals runs deep. Crowds gathered outside Buckingham Palace in London to view the wooden-framed notice announcing Prince Philip's death.

There has been speculation that as the queen ages, Prince Charles could become regent. In 1947, the queen made an oath on her 21st birthday: "I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family."

Britain's Regency Act states that if the sovereign is incapable of performing their duties then he or she can be replaced. That can happen only if voted for by three out of five officials, including Prince Charles, the Lord Chancellor, the Master of the Rolls and the Speaker of the House of Commons.

This would enable much of the queen's work, including weekly audiences with the British prime minister and signing off on laws, to be undertaken by Prince Charles. The queen would technically still be monarch.

ROB FINNEY/LONDON NEWS PICTURES/ZUMA PRESS

Sarah Onyango Obama, 99; Was a 'Bridge to the Past' For the Presidential Family

By ALAN COWELL

Sarah Onyango Obama, the stepgrandmother of former President Barack Obama who grew up without formal education in rural Kenya and devoted many of her later years to philanthropic efforts to help young Kenyans find places in school, died on Monday in Kisumu, a city in the western part of the country. She was 99.

The office of the Kenyan presidency confirmed her death, in a hospital, but did not specify the cause.

Known widely among Kenyans as Mama Sarah, Ms. Obama was seen as the matriarch of Mr. Obama's sprawling and sometimes fractious extended family in Africa.

She traveled to Washington in early 2009 to attend his inauguration as America's first Black president, but the two were separated not only by geography but also by divergent eras, lives and ways. At the inauguration, she presented him with an oxtail fly whisk, an emblem of power in Kenya. She spoke Luo, the tongue of her ethnic group, and some Swahili, and used an interpreter to translate her thoughts into English for the president.

There was some debate as to how often Mr. Obama interacted with his stepgrandmother, whom he referred to as Granny, according to his 1995 memoir, "Dreams From My Father." Some members of his family said that he had neglected her, along with his other family members in Kenya.

She was the second or third wife of Mr. Obama's grandfather Hussein Onyango Obama, who traced his polygamy to his ancestry and Muslim faith. His son, Barack Obama Sr., the president's father, spent his early years under Ms. Obama's tutelage.

Barack Sr. went on to attend the University of Hawaii, where he met Stanley Ann Dunham, the for-

mer president's mother. They married in 1961 and divorced three years later. Barack Sr. received a master's degree in economics at Harvard before returning to Kenya. Mr. Obama met his father only once after that, when he was 10 years old.

During Mr. Obama's second term, his half brother, Mark Okoth Obama Ndesandjo, told The New York Times that the president was "almost trying to leave behind the family that he so passionately engaged in those early years as he moves through the presidency."

Specifically, he said Mr. Obama had not called his stepgrandmother "for a number of years" although she was "the oldest member of our family and may leave us any day."

That was not the impression that Ms. Obama gave. Before the 2008 elections that sent Mr. Obama to the White House, journalists flocked to the village of Kogelo, in western Kenya, where she lived. Some noted that she did not have running water or electricity, although she seemed better off than most people in the village. Her home had a tin roof, rather than thatch, and she had a cell phone that she charged with a solar panel.

In 2014, during another reporter's visit, she gestured to a recently installed electric power supply as well as paved roads and running drinking water, attributing the improvements to her stepgrandson's presidency. (The enhancements, perhaps coincidentally, were precisely those she listed as her wishes in 2008 in an interview with Time magazine.)

Mr. Obama was also said to have telephoned and, through an interpreter, wished her a happy new year. "He is still very central to my life today," she said in 2014.

In a statement released on Monday, Mr. Obama wrote:

"Although not his birth mother, Granny would raise my father as her own, and it was in part thanks



Sarah Onyango Obama, above in 2008, was seen as the matriarch of the extended Obama family in Africa. In 2006, then-Senator Barack Obama, top, who called her Granny, visited her in Kenya.



Sharing family stories with her stepgrandson on his visit to Kenya.

when she won an Education Pioneer award at the United Nations. "I am their sole parent right now, so I fear pay school fees and also get them the things they need, like sanitary towels, books, necessities like a pencil, school uniforms. That's what I do."

But there were risks in her ties to the president as well. After the killing of Osama bin Laden by Navy SEALs in 2011, ordered by Mr. Obama, the Kenyan police tightened security in her village for fear of reprisals from a local affiliate of Al Qaeda. Even after Mr. Obama left office in 2017, those precautions were maintained.

Mr. Obama's own security arrangements prevented him from visiting the ancestral village.

When the president made an official visit to Kenya in 2015 — the first sitting American president to do so — his African relatives had to meet him in the capital, Nairobi. About three dozen members of his extended family, including his stepgrandmother, joined him at his hotel for dinner around long banquet tables.

During that trip Mr. Obama spoke at an indoor arena, where he was introduced by his half sister Auma Obama, who had met him during his first visit to Kenya three decades earlier. She told the audience that a Kenyan had said to Mr. Obama, "Don't get lost," but that there was no way he would.

"I'll tell you that because he was with me — he fit right in," she said. "He's not just our familia," she added. "He gets us. He gets us."

to her love and encouragement that he was able to defy the odds and do well enough in school to get a scholarship to attend an American university."

He added, "When I first traveled to Kenya to learn more about my heritage and father, who had passed away by then, it was Granny who served as a bridge to the past, and it was her stories that helped fill a void in my heart."

Sarah Onyango Obama was born in 1920 or 1921, in an era when British colonial records were patchy at best. She had said that she did not know the date or place of her birth.

Her husband, Hussein Onyango Obama, was a British officer's cook during World War II and was deployed to Burma, as Myanmar was then called.

The older Mr. Obama influenced his grandson's quest for self-discovery, as portrayed in "Dreams From My Father."

When he visited Kenya in the 1980s, Barack Obama was told by family members that his grandfa-

ther, like many of his compatriots, had turned against the British colonists after World War II and was tortured by them. That account of abuse was challenged in "Barack Obama: The Story" (2012), by the Washington Post journalist David Maraniss, but it was nonetheless deeply woven into the family narrative.

Hussein Onyango Obama was reputed to have been the first person in the area around Kogelo to have worn Western clothes, and he initially adopted Roman Catholicism before converting to Islam, when he married a woman from the largely Muslim island of Zanzibar. His son, Barack Sr., was raised as a Christian.

Into her 80s, though, Ms. Obama remained committed to Islam, rising at 5 a.m. to pray.

But she defended her stepgrandson when, as a presidential candidate, he was accused by his adversaries of being a Muslim who had not been born in the United States. "Untruths are told that don't have anything to do

with what Barack is about," she was quoted as saying in 2008 by The Associated Press. "I am very against it."

"In the world of today, children have different religions from their parents," she said.

Her family ties to her stepgrandson brought other challenges and suspicions, voiced by reporters who visited her, that members of her family were trying to draw benefit from presidential celebrity through books and foundations.

A year after the president's inauguration, Ms. Obama created her own foundation — the Mama Sarah Obama Foundation — to raise funds to build an educational campus in her village and to sponsor scholarships for young Kenyans, particularly girls, who would otherwise be denied schooling.

"I help the orphans and widows, especially the young girls who have been orphaned by their parents dying of H.I.V.," she told NPR through a translator in 2014,

Abdi Latif Dahir contributed reporting.