

The Future of Work Issue/ February 21, 2021

The New York Times Magazine

THE AMAZON AWAKENING ■ Covid-19 has cemented the company's hold on the economy — but it has also spurred employees to organize. ■ By Erika Hayasaki



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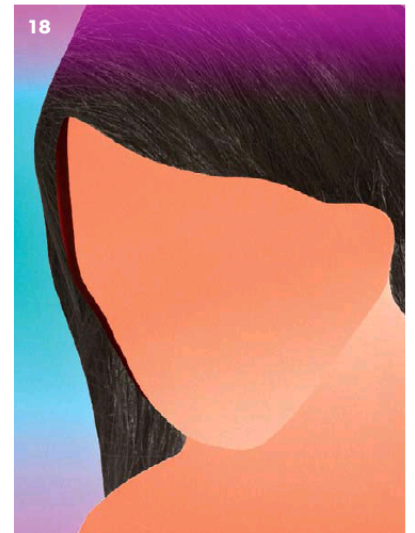
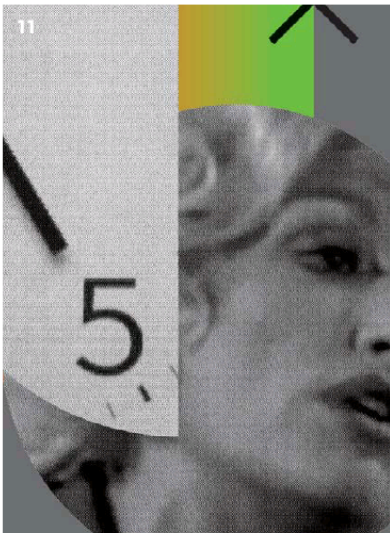
The New York Times Magazine

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Behind the Cover *Gail Bichler, creative director: "This week's cover story is about Amazon's ever-growing presence in American society, which has been heightened by the pandemic. Our feature focuses on the effects Amazon has had on the workers and economy of Eastvale, Calif., as well as employee efforts to organize nationwide. For the cover illustration, we had a massive Amazon delivery box cast a shadow over a nameless town to symbolize the company's reach." Photo illustration by James Casebere.*

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Ask the right question and you might get an answer you never imagined.



2019 Nobel Laureate William G. Kaelin Jr., MD

“How do cells adjust to the amount of oxygen they need to live?” With that incisive question, the Nobel Prize-winning discovery of William G. Kaelin Jr., MD, showed how cancer cells hijack the body’s systems to provide the oxygen they need, and led to a new class of oxygen-regulating drugs for kidney cancer patients. Notably, Dr. Kaelin’s work has also influenced areas beyond cancer such as heart disease, anemia and macular degeneration. Audacious thinking has built a momentum of discovery at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute for nearly 75 years.

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Introduction by Vauhini Vara*

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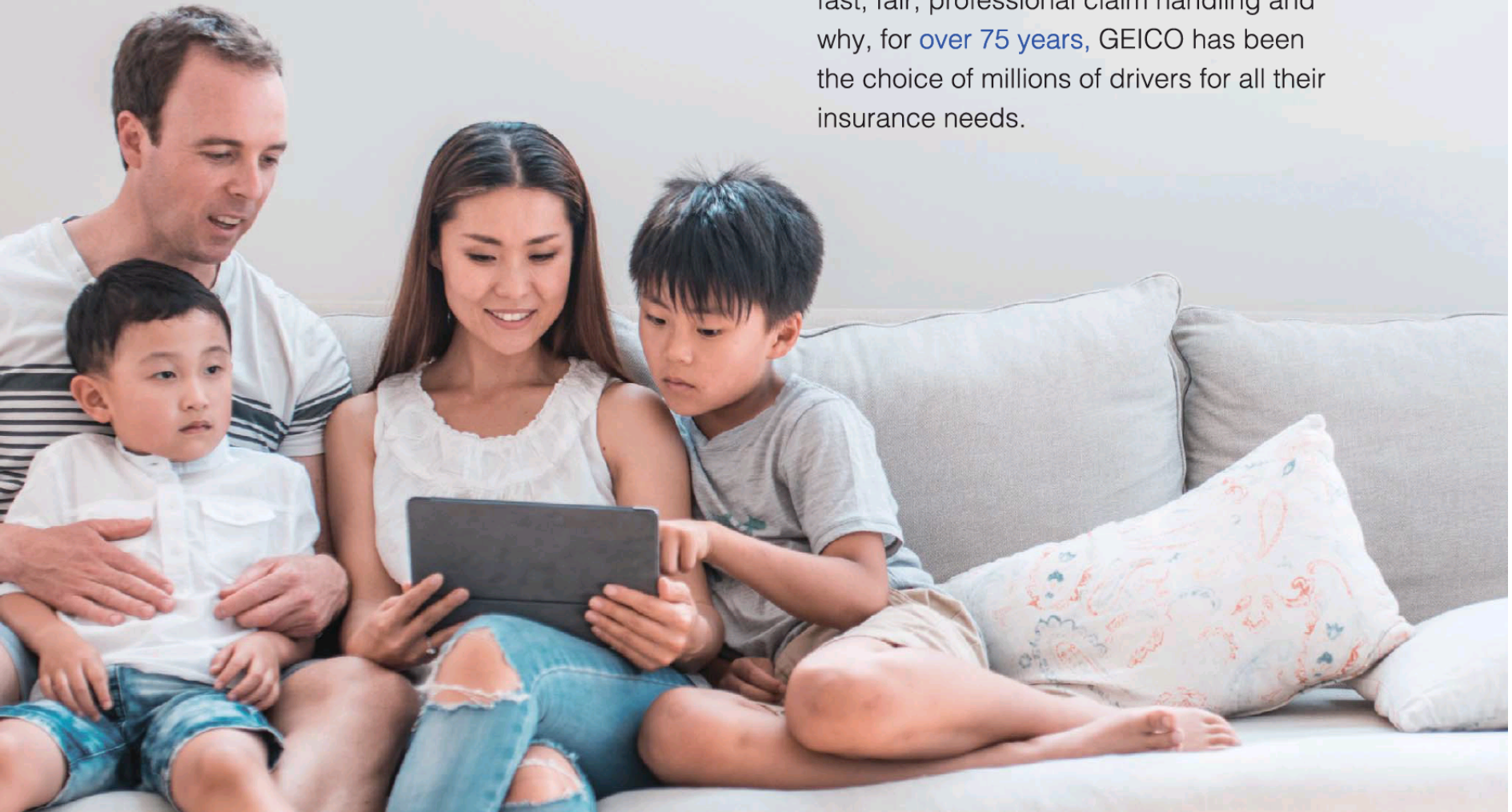
An Amazon worker in a Facebook group wrote, 'I'm not sure if a union is a good idea, but as it is, I don't think it could hurt.'

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Workers at the LGB3 Amazon facility in Eastvale, Calif., in January. Photograph by Reuben Cox for The New York Times.

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Contributors

Sabiha Cimen

"Workers on the Edge,"
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Sabiha Cimen is a Magnum photographer who splits her time between Istanbul and New York. Her work focuses on women, Islamic culture, portraiture and still life. She first photographed for the magazine a feature about public baths, or hammams, in Istanbul. For this issue, she photographed seven essential workers whose jobs have been transformed by the pandemic. "I was afraid that the two virtual shoots would lose a certain intimacy," Cimen says. "I was surprised that the subjects' characters shone through. For the actual photo sessions, I traveled to five different cities. It gave me new appreciation for how hard people are working to help one another through these difficult times."

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James Casebere

Cover photo illustration

James Casebere is an artist known for his photographs of architecturally based models and is represented by Sean Kelly Gallery. His work is in the collections of and has been shown at major museums around the world including the Whitney, the Guggenheim and MoMA.

Lovia Gyarkye

"Workers on the Edge,"
Page 42

Lovia Gyarkye is the associate editor of The New York Times for Kids. She last contributed reporting to the magazine's project about food insecurity in America.

Erika Hayasaki

"The Amazon Awakening,"
Page 26

Erika Hayasaki is a freelance writer based in Southern California who teaches in the Literary Journalism Program at the University of California, Irvine.

Jordan Kisner

"The Wages of Housework,"
Page 34

Jordan Kisner is the author of the essay collection "Thin Places," out in paperback this April, from which her last article for the magazine, about America's autopsy crisis, was adapted.

Yiren Lu

"All Tomorrow's Meetings,"
Page 38

Yiren Lu is a writer and software engineer based in New York. She last wrote for the magazine about the e-commerce platform Shopify.

Jenna Wortham

"The Down Load,"
Page 52

Jenna Wortham is a staff writer for the magazine, co-host of the podcast "Still Processing" and co-editor of the anthology "Black Futures," with Kimberly Drew.

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Readers respond to the 2.7.2021 issue.

RE: STEVEN YEUN

Jay Caspian Kang profiled the star of the film “Minari.”



Taiwanese in ethnicity, born to undocumented and unwed parents in California, then privately adopted, I have experienced both the privilege and freedoms of being American and the oppression of feeling both unseen and that your identity exists only through another’s gaze. This piece articulately told the story of intergenerational trauma without naming it. For those trying to bridge the gap by creating art or any act of kindness, do not stop trying. I moved to New York City at 21, trying to prove my worth through how much I earned, not yet knowing I’d never be able to afford my entire life without benefiting from someone else’s oppression. The writer quietly names how Asian-American immigrants have often successfully made it, through the dominant predatory culture of greed and capitalism. Is this addiction to a six-figure education, watches, two-car garages, celebrity, etc., shortchanging our real pursuit of freedom in identity?

Amelia Ewert, New York

What an incredible, moving piece of writing! I am a first-generation immigrant and a parent to kids who were born in America. You have articulated feelings that I recognize but couldn’t have expressed as well as this. And I love how you acknowledge that when you are a product of two cultures, you are a third unique culture, all your own. Thank you!

Jay Kang’s reflections on performing for or resisting the white gaze are so poignant.

It’s like a perpetual state of adolescence, trying to create your own identity while living in someone else’s home.

Tomi J., New York

“I remember when I first went to L.A. and saw these totally free Korean dudes,” Yeun said. “They weren’t weighted down with all that same self-consciousness. They even walked differently.”

This quote, and the few passing references in “Minari” about those L.A., church-going Koreans, are such an underdiscussed part of the immigrant experience. So much of how immigration is portrayed is monolithic. When I was a Korean growing up in Atlanta during the ’80s and ’90s, there were no stories about immigrants in the South — they all seemed to take place in New York or Los Angeles. I longed to go there and be among people like me. When I finally got to live in L.A., I was fascinated by how confident and rooted Korean Angelenos felt to their place in the city. The Korean immigration experience was not a singular one, which is why I’m so happy that an actor like Steven Yeun and a director like Lee Isaac Chung can add layers to this narrative through their work and life experiences.

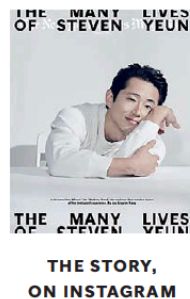
Laura, Atlanta



RE: CLASSICS

Rachel Poser profiled a professor of classics fighting to disrupt how the subject is taught.

I, like Dan-el Padilla Peralta, studied the classics as an outsider. Granted, I am not Black. But I am female and Jewish, and the old white male professors who taught me regularly dished out misogyny and anti-Semitism in ways subtle and not so subtle. Is it they, i.e., those nasty old



THE STORY, ON INSTAGRAM
He did not need to pop off in the pic like that.
@shan.christensen

self-appointed guardians of the classics, whom Padilla is referring to when he rails — justifiably, to be sure — against the “classical tradition”? Or do the actual Greek and Latin texts figure into his case for canceling the study of classics? And what about the study of the Greek and Latin languages? Lucretius and Aristotle and Aeschylus belong to whoever reads and integrates them, not to the “classical tradition.” Professor Padilla, you say in Poser’s article that you don’t want to demolish classics but want to “build something.” There’s all kinds of ways to integrate your expertise in this discipline. But please, don’t cancel it.

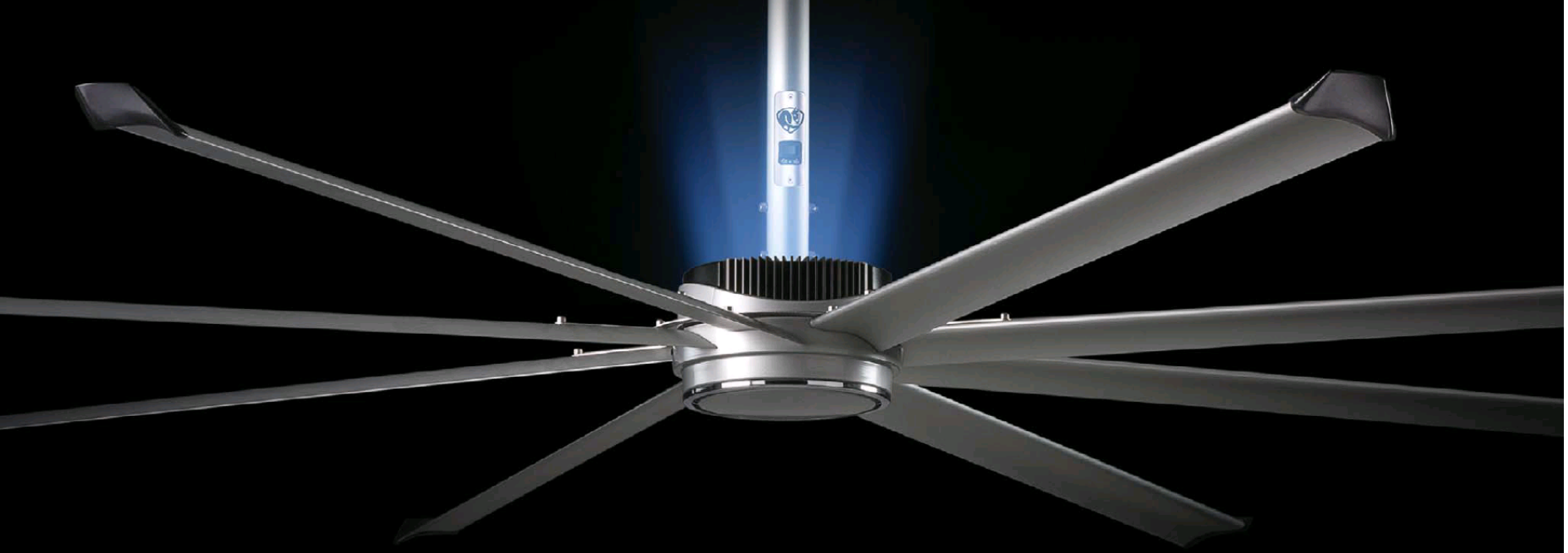
Alice, New York



I am a young, queer classicist; I have a complicated relationship with my field. I am not usually one to make absolute statements, but in this instance I feel confident stating that demolishing classics, as Dr. Padilla (who, I will note, is older than I and further along in his academic career than I am, and I respect his work, his knowledge and his convictions) puts it, is, in no uncertain terms, wrong, foolish and, above all, absolutely futile. I love the Greek and Latin languages and many elements of the cultures that produced them, even while I recognize that these cultures would most likely not have loved me, a lesbian from a middling socioeconomic background with few domestic skills and even less prospect of a dowry. I don’t love them blindly; ancient texts make me question the world as it is, was and will be, and I have certainly become more cynical about ancient Greece and Rome as I have become more familiar with them.

MKE, Rhode Island

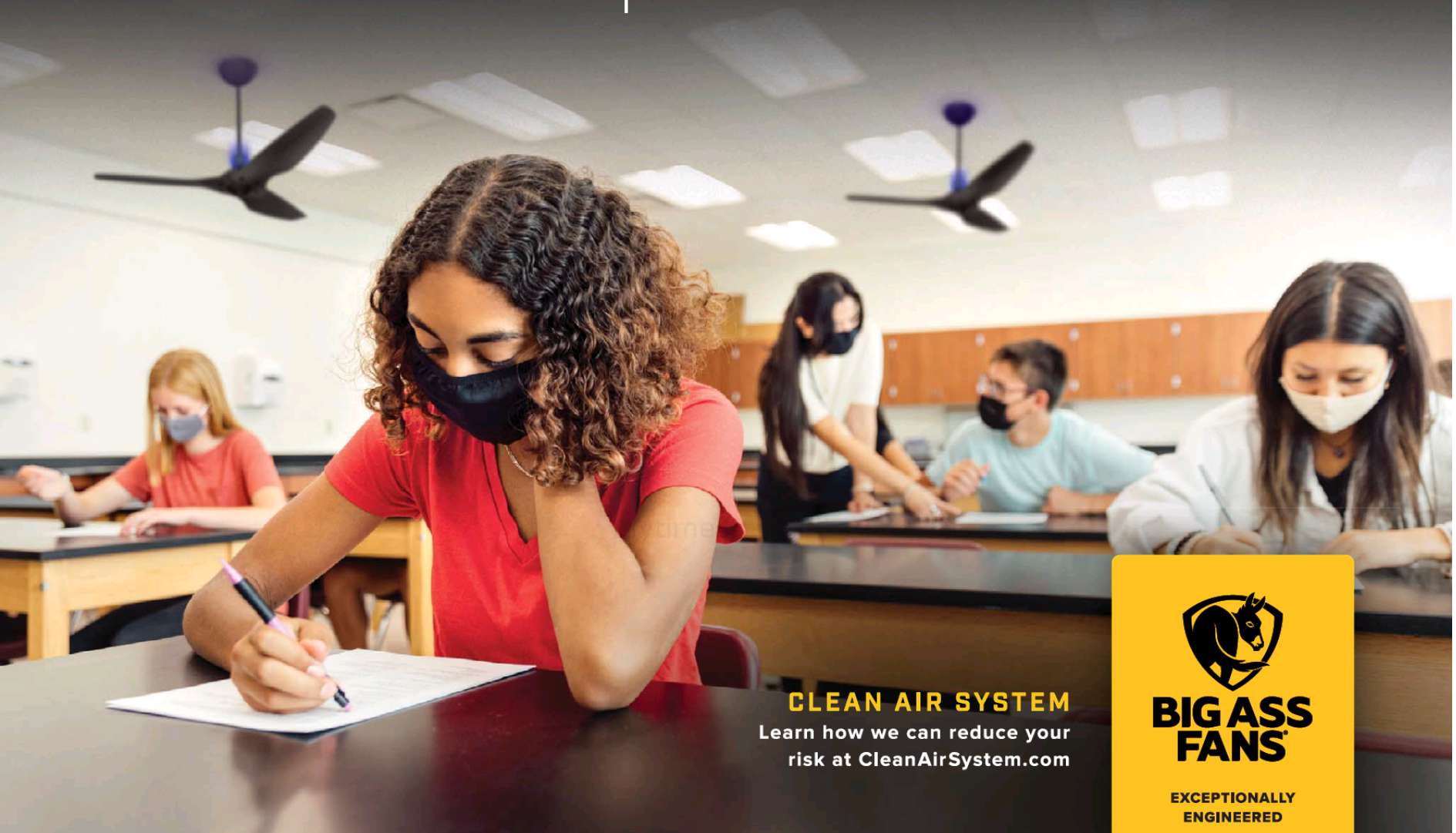
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Midnight Oil



A protest song about degrading work becomes a rousing call to do even more work after that. ● By Brooke Jarvis

● We open to shades of gray and beige and what must be the world's dullest office. In case you didn't notice the overwhelming tedium, though, there's help: One actor's heavy eyelids are dragging his whole body downward, and another, slumped onto one elbow, seems to be collapsing so thoroughly



into his desk that he might merge with it. By the time we see papers thudding into the inbox of a young woman — the camera loses focus as she contemplates the files, as if it shares her despair — we've gotten the message: Work is where joy goes to die.

Then a flicker of hope crosses the woman's face. She has looked up at the clock, which is moments away from striking 5. She opens her laptop, where we see our first glimpse of real color, in the website for a dance-fitness business she's starting. After one last edit, she hits publish, then closes the laptop to an office transformed. Her gray sweater is now a red tank top, and she dances past her officemates, all now in bright outfits, converting their

cubicles into creative small businesses: an art studio, a bakery, a woodworking shop, a landscaping business that seems to specialize in topiary sculptures, something involving scuba. Their life force is restored, because their jobs and their dreams are now one.

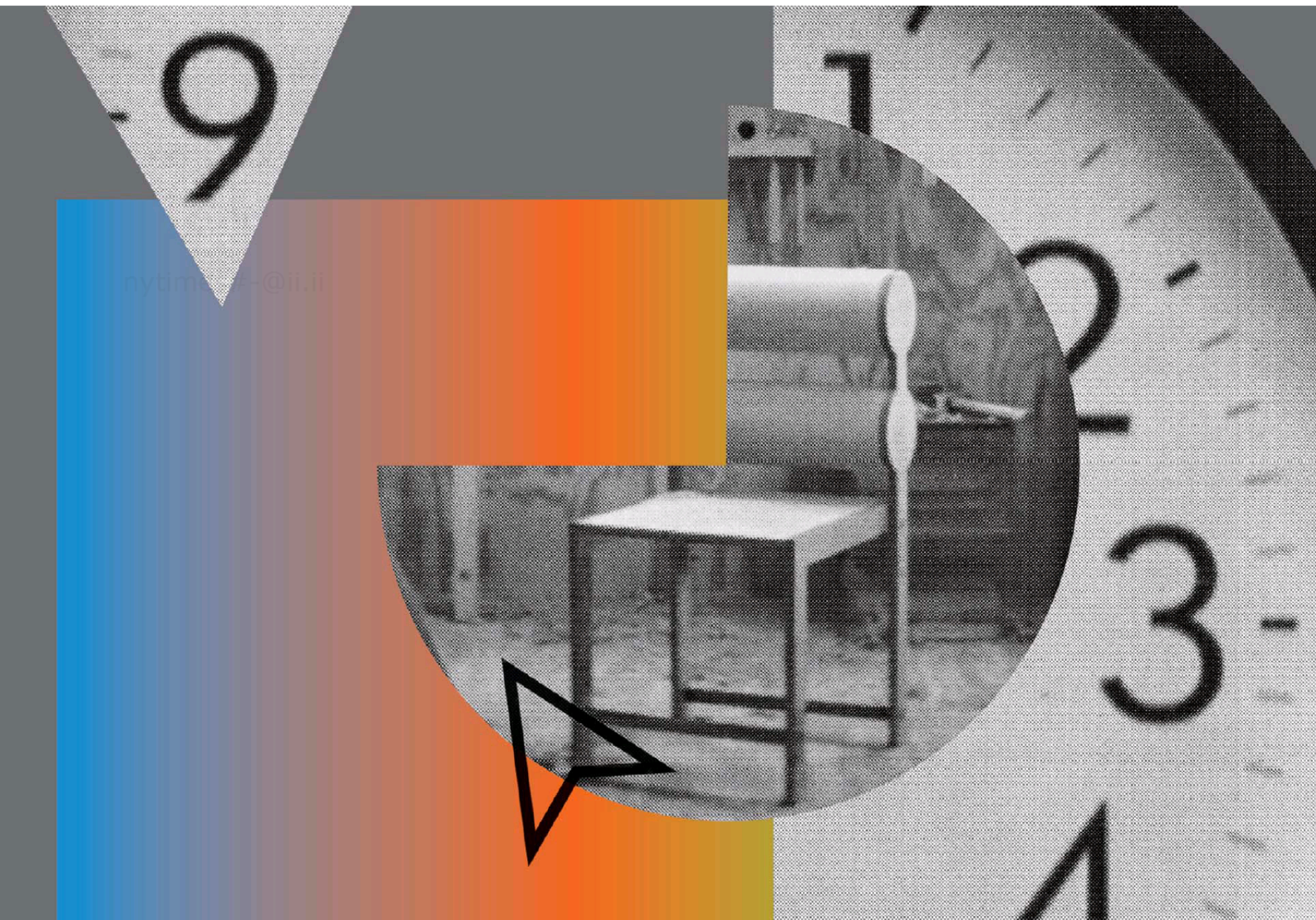
The message is familiar, and classically American: bootstraps and businesses, Horatio Alger for the Instagram generation. If this ad — aired by Squarespace, a service for building and hosting websites, during this year's Super Bowl — had only had a different soundtrack, it might well have been forgotten by Monday.

But all this was set to Dolly Parton singing a reimagined version of her famous "9 to 5," originally written for the hit 1980

'5 to 9, you keep working, working, working, working.'

comedy of the same name. In that movie, Parton, Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin play office workers who semiaccidentally kidnap their sexist boss and, in his absence, transform their office, offering flexible hours, on-site child care and equal pay for men and women. The movie, in turn, was inspired by real women: a group of Boston secretaries who banded together in 1973 to fight against degrading and unfair working conditions. *They* are the ones who named their cause after the eight daily hours of their lives they wanted to make better.

The updated song moves work into the remaining hours: It's called "5 to 9," and it is, according to Squarespace, "a modern rallying cry for all the dreamers



working to turn an after-hours passion or project into a career.” The two songs are bizarre images of each other: both feisty and plucky, the same tune with very different messages. In the original lyrics: “They let you dream just to watch them shatter,” and “It’s a rich man’s game no matter what they call it/ And you spend your life putting money in his wallet.” Now Parton offers that you could “Change your life, do something that gives it meaning/With a website that is worthy of your dreaming.” By the end, she’s belting: “5 to 9, you keep working, working, working, working.” Where once was righteous outrage at a broken system, there is now self-help. And grinding.

After the ad aired, as Squarespace tried to promote the hashtag #5to9, a counter-version appeared: #9to5ShouldBeEnough. The ad clearly felt, to many of its viewers, like yet another glorification of an economy in which people must work more jobs, for ever longer hours, just to survive to the next paycheck — often for gig-economy companies that classify them as “independent” contract laborers, instead of offering the sorts of protected, benefited, living-wage jobs for which the women of the original 9to5 group continue to fight. It didn’t help that the gig-economy mainstays DoorDash and UberEats aired their own Super Bowl ads branding themselves as genial supporters of small businesses. DoorDash used the “Sesame Street” song

‘5 to 9 means to me that I have more time in the day to do more things.’ Dolly Parton, in a Squarespace promotional interview

“People in Your Neighborhood”; UberEats resurrected the tongue-in-cheek anti-corporate message of “Wayne’s World.” Both companies have taken in billions during the pandemic, skimming hefty fees off the struggling local restaurants whose food they deliver.

Squarespace’s ad was a little different: Starting your own business is not the same as working in the gig economy, no matter how much gig-economy companies like to frame working for them as “being your own boss.” Still, it’s striking that the jobs in the ad — the sorts of creatively fulfilling jobs that characters have in romantic comedies — are also the sorts that are ever rarer and more untenable in our increasingly corporatized economy. Rather than

reflecting the work most people actually do in their second shifts, they offer a dream that papers over reality.

This was a poor message, AdWeek chided, at a time when “hustle culture feels downright toxic.” Inevitably, though, debate about the ad landed not on Squarespace, but on the shoulders of Parton herself. Was she profiting off the fetishization of an exploitative economy, or was she just another hard-working American with her own side hustle? (There’s an ad within the ad, for Parton’s new fragrance line, which uses a Square-space site). A Washington Post headline referred to the ad as “Dolly Parton’s betrayal,” while one in Newsweek argued that the ad “Shows We Live in a Dystopia” — but only after cautiously averring that “Dolly Parton Is Awesome.”

Parton is beloved for her music, her savvy, her generosity — but also for being the rare celebrity who has managed to rise above the polarization of a country that seems to agree on little except its admiration of her. She is careful not to appear to choose sides in our culture wars, and that circumspection creates a space for us to project, ardently, our own politics onto her choices. Perhaps she was surprised to learn how many people found an ad about hustling after your dream job — the real story of her own hardscrabble-to-superstardom life — to be political. But viewers of the ad saw it in the context of their own experiences: endlessly working, working, working, working.

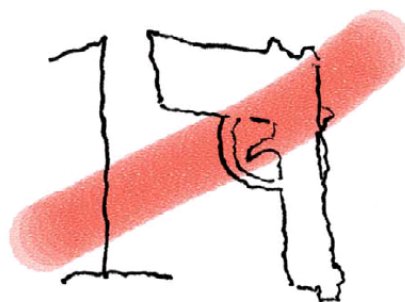
What’s interesting about the two versions of the song isn’t what they tell us about Parton. It’s what they show us about how, four decades later, our economy is still broadly failing the people who toil inside it. The original lyrics offer frustration and disbelief — “What a way to make a living!” — and a clear diagnosis of the problem: companies that aren’t required to respect or take care of their workers. In Squarespace’s hands, the words become “a *whole new* way to make a living” — a dream of escape, of going out on your own because you’ve given up on an economy that refuses to look out for you.

But listeners reacting online kept mishearing that new line. They detected something a lot closer to how they actually experience our economy. Endless hustling, they heard, now offers neither solution nor escape; it is, simply, “the *only* way to make a living.” ♦

Poem Selected by Reginald Dwayne Betts

My parents grew up in Washington, D.C. My aunts, uncles. My sisters. My brother. This poem will sing to them because they’ll recognize something in the absurdity of the opening two lines: a metal detector juxtaposed with a high school. The insanity augurs the death that follows. By poem’s end, when Joel Dias-Porter closes his folder of nature poems and settles into what poetry might not fix, you realize that he has crafted a modern elegy. “Pistils” reminds the readers of “pistols,” reminding us that the aftermath of a gunshot is not beauty but silence.

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Wednesday Poem

By Joel Dias-Porter

I pass through the metal detector,
inside the front doors of Cardozo High,
with xeroxed poems and a lesson planned
to introduce my students to the wild iris.
After signing my name in the visitors’ log,
I bop down to flights of steps.
Outside the classroom things are too quiet
and Mr. Bruno (who’s Puerto Rican and writes poetry)
takes ten minutes to answer the door.
There’s a student snapshot in his hand.
*One of our kids got shot last night,
Remember Maurice? Maurice Caldwell.
He didn’t come to school much.*
A Crisis Response Team has the kids in a circle,
and I’ve never seen them sit so quietly.
Every computer in the classroom is dead.
A drawing of Maurice is taped to the board,
a bouquet of cards pinned under it,
Keisha (who writes funny poems in class)
says Maurice would help her with math,
she liked him but never told him. @ii.ii
The Crisis lady says *It’s OK to cry.*
Keisha says she been ran out of tears.

Mr. Bruno tells me *Somebody called him
from a parked Buick on Thomas Place NW.
When he walked up, they fired three times.*
I freeze. That’s a half block from my house.
There are four crackhouses on that block
and I never walk down that street.
I wonder why he approached the car,
was he hustling crack or weed?
Or did he recognize the dude and smile
before surprise blossomed across his face
and the truth rooted into his flesh.
His face flashes before my irises,
I see him horseplaying with Haneef,
his hair slicked back into a ponytail.
He wrote one poem this whole semester,
a battle rap between cartoon characters.
Mr. Bruno asks if I still want to teach.
I open my folder of nature poems,
then close the folder and slump in a chair.
What simile can seal a bullet wound?
Which student could these pistils protect,
here where it’s natural to never see seventeen?

Reginald Dwayne Betts is a poet and lawyer. He created the Million Book Project, an initiative to curate microlibraries and install them in prisons across the country. His latest collection of poetry, “Felon,” explores the post-incarceration experience. In 2019, he won a National Magazine Award in Essays and Criticism for his article in *The Times Magazine* about his journey from teenage carjacker to aspiring lawyer. **Joel Dias-Porter** is a poet based in Atlantic City, N.J. He edited the anthology “The Black Rooster Social Inn,” and his poetry has been featured in the anthologies “Bum Rush the Page: A Def Poetry Jam,” “Catch The Fire!!!: A Cross-Generational Anthology of Contemporary African-American Poetry” and “Bullets into Bells: Poets & Citizens Respond to Gun Violence.”

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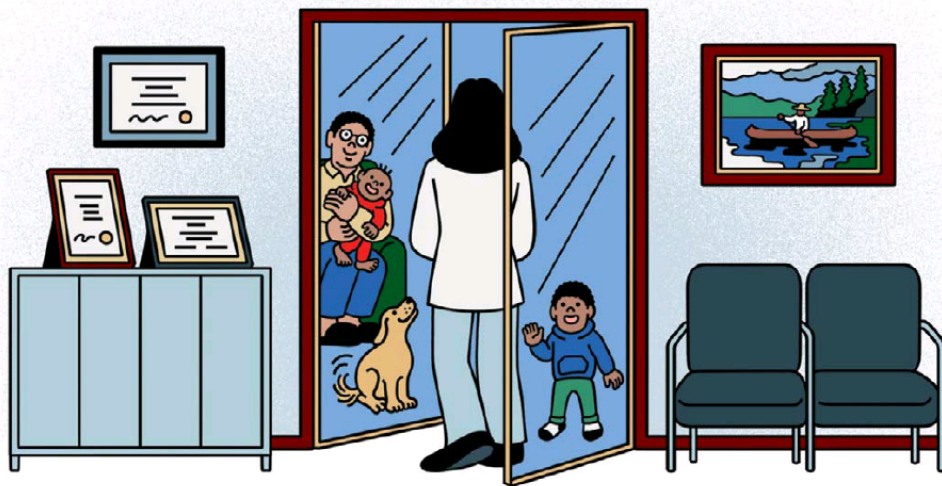
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There's a Need for Mental-Health Professionals Like Me. Can I Still Quit?

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I've worked in the mental-health field for more than a decade. I have prided myself on pursuing a vocation that centers on helping others. In the context of the pandemic and its ongoing traumatic fallout, however, I have found myself pulling away from the world and instead turning my focus inward to myself and my family.

I would like to take a leave from my profession and become a stay-at-home parent. I am fortunate to be in a position to do so. I feel immense guilt, however, about shifting to a life that will be turned inward rather than outward. This feels particularly egregious after this year, in which stress and mental illness are raging, bigotry is more salient than ever and so many are suffering from poverty.

Furthermore, the mental illness in which I specialize has skyrocketed during the pandemic, and there is a dearth of providers who treat it. I have typically felt judgmental of and saddened by people who just live their lives focused on themselves and their own families, but now I feel a strong pull to do just that.

During particularly turbulent periods like this in the world, is it ever OK to stick my head in the sand? Is it ethical to leave a helping profession at a time when people need that help most if I do so out of choice, not necessity?

K., San Francisco

If morality concerns what we owe to others, ethics — in a tradition reaching back to the ancients — encompasses a broader terrain: It concerns how a life should be lived. And a central idea in modern ethics is that each of us has the primary responsibility for making a well-lived life. With the exception of moral saints like Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa, we pretty much all could have lived a life in which we made a significantly larger contribution to the welfare of others. Every moment spent making a meal for my family is time I might have devoted to a soup kitchen.

Some people — proponents of utilitarianism — have thought that your task as a human being is simply to aim at doing the

most you can for the collective welfare. I doubt that this is right. It seems to me that ethics permits you to give special weight to you and yours; indeed, it requires you to give special weight to those with whom you have the sorts of connections we have with family, friends, colleagues, fellow citizens and a whole host of people to whom we have what philosophers call “special obligations” by virtue of our relationships. Giving particular weight to you and yours doesn’t mean you can ignore the moral demands of others, especially when it comes to their rights. But it does mean that people with whom you have no special relationship are not entitled to your special care.

How is the moral calculus affected by the fact that you have training in an area of unmet need, and have the opportunity to render a service that most people cannot? It would certainly be admirable to take this into consideration in deciding how to live your life. Your turning entirely away from using your highly developed skills would represent a loss; I’d be saddened to see it. But I hope I wouldn’t be judgmental, as you put it, as well. Not least because focusing on our own families can also be admirable, especially in these difficult times. Raising children into happy, decent adults is one of the most important things we can do.

I would urge you to consider, though, whether there are ways of balancing these calls, rather than choosing between them — perhaps there’s a way to do some professional work part time? But if making a good life is a responsibility that each of us has to manage ourselves, balancing the demands of the many worthwhile things we could do is a central part of that task, and one not to be delegated to anyone else.

I live in a city that offers Covid vaccines to volunteers who have worked 15 hours at a vaccination site. Not surprisingly, the demand for volunteer slots far exceeds supply. I got my first shot last week. I have more volunteer shifts scheduled for the next few weeks. Should I relinquish those shifts to others, so they can be vaccinated? Does the answer change if I am assured that my shifts will go to friends who I know are also hard-working volunteers? I feel an obligation to continue volunteering because a) I don't want to disappear now that I have the vaccine; and b) even after just one shot, it is probably safer for me to



Bonus Advice From Judge John Hodgman

Taylor writes: My fiancée, Arielle, throws away my Kewpie Mayo once the bottle is half empty. She says it looks “too floppy.” But she keeps opened bottles of salad dressing in the fridge for ages!

This case involves the conflict of two important, pandemic-era rights: the right to avoid visual pollution in the home you’re trapped in and the right to have as much damn mayonnaise as you want. Kewpie, for those who don’t know, is a Japanese mayo prized by cooks for its distinctive extra yoliness, and it comes wrapped in a bag with a weird baby on it. I understand why Arielle gets grossed out as the thin bottle droops. But it’s good stuff, not easy to find and no grosser than a crusty bottle of Newman’s Own past its prime. Tell her that the Kewpie mascot is Paul Newman’s secret great-grandson, so don’t throw the baby out with the bath mayo (a famous saying)!

To submit a query: Send an email to ethicist@nytimes.com; or send mail to The Ethicist, The New York Times Magazine, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018. (Include a daytime phone number.)

Illustration by Louise Zergaeng Pomeroy

interact with patients (who are old or otherwise vulnerable) than someone who has not been vaccinated at all. However, I also feel a duty to let someone else be vaccinated.

Elaine, Dallas

Your vaccination was done early not in order to get you to volunteer but in order to make your shifts safer for you and for those you serve. Stopping now undermines that purpose. You're considering stopping so that someone else can be vaccinated. But someone will get that dose whatever you do. You've framed the question to yourself in terms of a "duty to let someone else be vaccinated." But suppose you asked whether it's OK to game the system in order to favor one or two of your friends. I'm sure that prospect wouldn't sit well with you.

By the logic of this "duty" you invoke, each of your diligent friends should spend the minimum amount of time working at the site in order to be vaccinated

and then pass the opportunity along to another. Your duty is, in fact, to do your job and recognize that the vaccination program doesn't exist for the benefit of those who work there. Volunteering was a gift; but if you treat the work as means for vaccinating friends who don't otherwise qualify, it's in danger of becoming a gift. You'd only be diverting vaccine doses away from people who have been declared eligible by a system of vaccine distribution that seeks to achieve a variety of aims. Allowing people who work at a vaccination site to get special treatment for their friends isn't one of those aims.

In my state and possibly elsewhere, food-bank volunteers get priority access to coronavirus vaccines. Is it ethical to start volunteering at a food bank in order to be vaccinated sooner?

Name Withheld, Somerville, Mass.

The best kind of people do what is right for the best reasons. The moral saint

Giving particular weight to you and yours doesn't mean you can ignore the moral demands of others.

would volunteer unselfishly at the food bank because it's a way of serving the disadvantaged in her community. You're admitting you're not that perfect person. But volunteering for the food bank, even if for less-than-admirable reasons, is still a good thing to do. Once again, the vaccination isn't a reward for that good act; it's necessary to reduce the chances of people (including you) becoming infected at the food bank. Still, it can also be an incentive to sign up, as people in your community obviously know, and in these circumstances, it's not terribly likely that you'll get loads of unmerited kudos for showing up. Were you then to contrive for the job to carousel among your otherwise vaccine-ineligible friends, though, you'd be abusing the arrangement. If your motives are self-serving, make sure that your actions are above board. ♦

Kwame Anthony Appiah teaches philosophy at N.Y.U. His books include "Cosmopolitanism," "The Honor Code" and "The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity."

Human
ingenuity

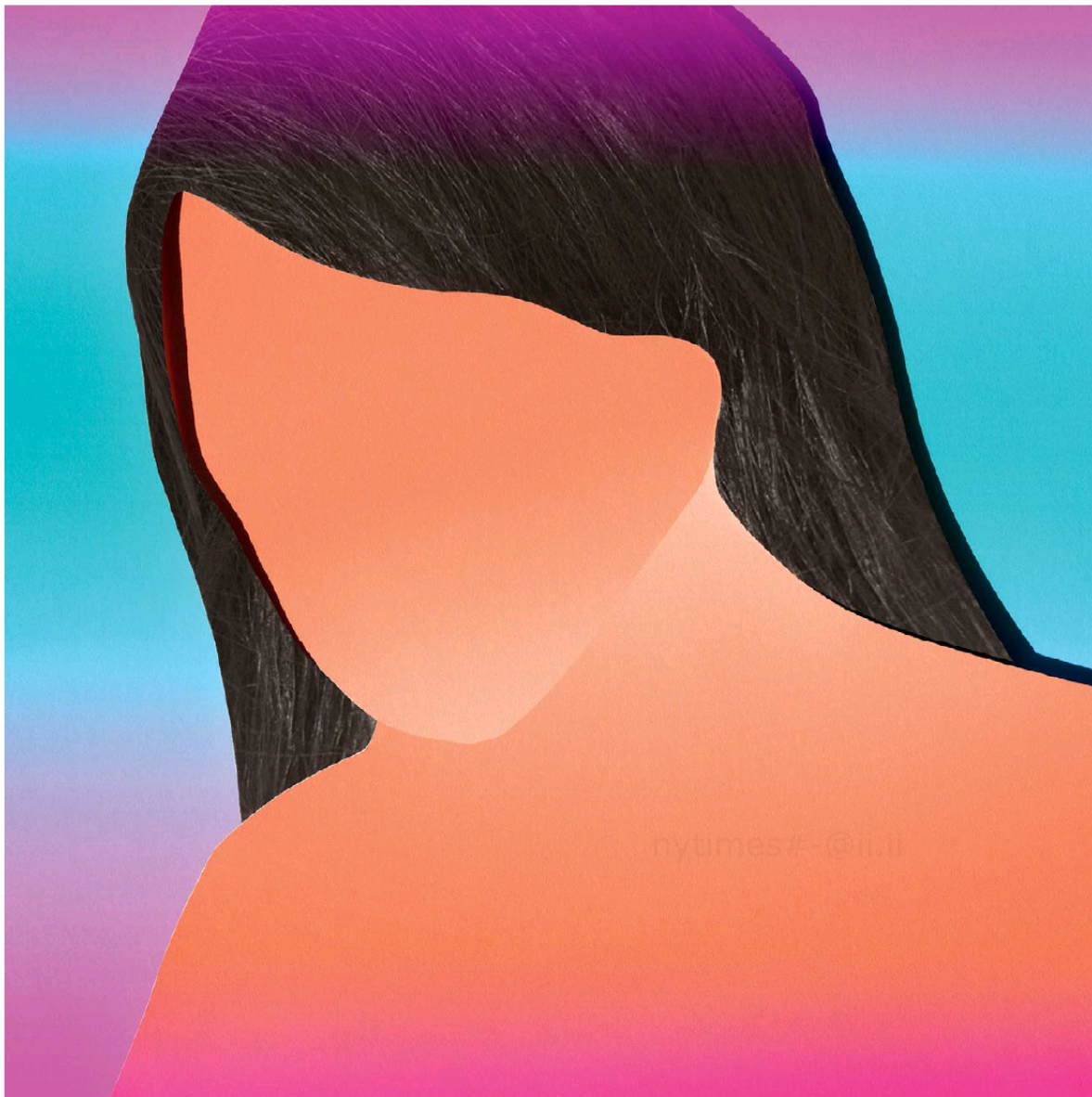
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Machine
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She was days away from defending her dissertation when her doctor told her to put it on hold. Did her low white-blood-cell count mean cancer?

nytimes#-@ii.ii



The 38-year-old woman made it to her car before she broke down in tears. A wife and mother of three, she was about to start her third year as a medical student at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. But before that, in just a few days, she was supposed to defend her dissertation to complete the research component of her combined M.D.-Ph.D. program. Now one of her doctors, a hematologist, had just suggested she postpone everything. She needed a bone-marrow biopsy right away. And the results of that biopsy, the doctor told her ominously, could have major implications for her career and her life.

He wouldn't say what he was worried about, but the answer seemed clear: cancer. What else could merit such a dramatic suggestion? She allowed herself a few minutes to feel sad and briefly mourn everything she could lose. Then she dried her face, blew her nose and, as she drove home, came up with a plan. From her driveway she called her uncle — a cardiologist in town — to get his advice.



Perilously Low White-Blood-Cell Count

Six months earlier, she told her uncle, she went to a new primary-care doctor, who sent off some routine blood work. A couple of days later, she received a call saying that one part of her white-blood-cell count — her neutrophils — was low. It was probably a lab error, or maybe she'd had a viral infection that knocked it down; she should be retested in a few weeks. But then Covid-19 hit, and everything came to a standstill.

She finally got around to having the recommended test months later. When her doctor called with the results, he also had a referral. She needed to see a hematologist. Her white count was now dangerously low.

If white blood cells are the armed forces defending the body from outside invaders, the cells she was missing, the neutrophils, are the Marines, the fiercest first-line defenders against almost any infection. A normal count is over 1,500. Her first count had been low at 1,000. Now it was 400. The risk of infection skyrockets in patients with counts below 500. She saw the hematologist, she told her uncle, and he had told her to hold everything — indefinitely.

Her uncle was quiet for a moment. She needed a second opinion; he would call her right back. An hour later, he

called with a name and a number: Dr. Sandrine Niyongere, a relatively new hematologist at the university, who came very highly recommended.

When the woman called Niyongere's office to make an appointment, the doctor herself got on the phone. She had reviewed the patient's records and had a few questions. How did she feel? Was she sick? Tired? Did she feel bad at all? No, the patient reported; she felt fine. That was why it all seemed so strange. How could she have whatever terrible thing this doctor thought she had and feel just fine? The doctor asked again if she was tired. Of course she was tired! She had three children and had been working crazy hours to complete her research and her dissertation so she could continue her medical training on time. But did that mean she had a life-threatening disease?

"Go defend your dissertation," Niyongere encouraged the woman. She would see the patient after her dissertation defense. "We'll figure this out," she said.



Just One Medication

The student's defense was on the following Tuesday. She thought it went well. Then, just before 5 p.m. that Friday, she arrived at the university's cancer center. Despite the airy modern lobby, just entering the building felt oppressive and heavy with unthinkable possibilities. And because of Covid-19 restrictions, she would have to face them alone.

In Niyongere's office, she first spoke with a trainee, who disappeared after taking a full history and performing an exam and then returned with the young doctor the patient had spoken to over the phone. A distant part of her brain observed that her doctor was younger than she was.

The hematologist sat across from the patient and slowly laid out what she knew. In someone who is otherwise healthy, whose other types of blood are fine, this kind of severe drop in neutrophils — what's known medically as neutropenia — is usually caused by a medication. There were other possibilities, of course. Nutritional deficiencies could do this. Insufficient vitamin B12 or copper could affect blood counts. Some viral infections — H.I.V., mono, hepatitis — could, too. And they would look for those. But her money was on a medication. The doctor knew that the only medication the patient took

regularly was Adderall; she had a history of A.D.H.D. And Niyongere hadn't found anything in the medical literature linking this drug with neutropenia. Still, the hematologist insisted, it was the most likely cause of her isolated neutropenia.

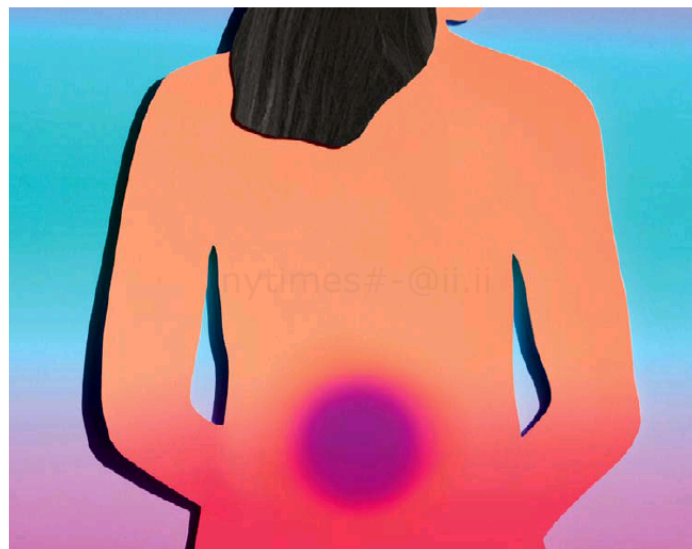
They would look for infections. They would check her levels of vitamins and minerals. And if all these were normal, the next step would be a bone-marrow biopsy. The doctor expected it to be normal — with lots of blood cells of all types being made and released. Her first hematologist was right that a cancer or disease process affecting the production of these vital defenders was possible — but it was very unlikely, in Niyongere's opinion, given how healthy the patient looked and felt. Meanwhile, she should stop the Adderall.



The Tests Come Back

The following week was busy as the student prepared to restart the medical-school part of her education. In just a few days, she would be in the hospital learning to care for sick patients, and she needed her immune system to be up to the task. She watched as the test results came back. The vitamin levels were normal. She didn't have any of the viruses. And so that Friday the student went back to Niyongere's office for a bone-marrow biopsy. The doctor suggested doing it in

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the hospital operating room with sedation. No, the patient insisted. They would do it in the office. It was a tough procedure, but the patient wanted to get it over with. She needed an answer and some more neutrophils before she could safely be around the sick patients she would see in the hospital.

The results came back faster than she expected. A wave of weakness forced her to sit down as she read the results: normal. There was no sign of leukemia or any of the other processes that could affect her body's ability to make neutrophils. And she was making a healthy amount of all the white blood cells, including neutrophils. That meant that whatever was happening to those warrior cells was happening after they left the safety of the bone marrow and entered the bloodstream. That's what you would expect if this was a reaction to a medication. Many medications can cause neutropenia. Some drugs destroy these fighter cells directly. Some trigger an immune response so that other parts of the body's defense system mistake these cells for invading pathogens and attack them.

If it were a reaction to a medication, then stopping it would allow the cell count to rebound, sometimes almost immediately. Neutrophils have a very short life span, and a full complement of new cells is released from the bone marrow every day. The student waited anxiously for her next blood count. Could just stopping her Adderall get her back to normal?

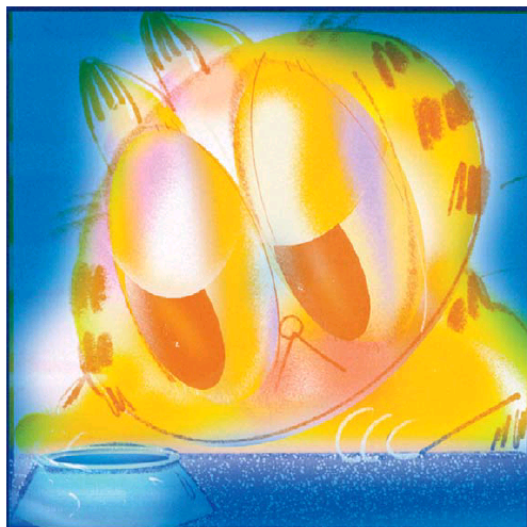
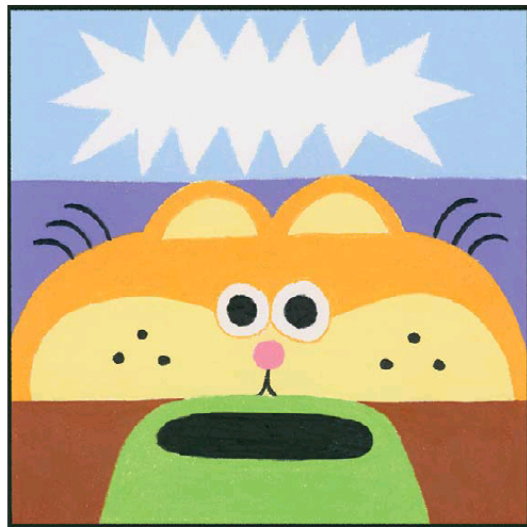
The answer was a resounding yes. Her neutrophils had doubled from their lowest point weeks earlier. They weren't quite back to normal, but she was well above the most dangerous range. She started her rotation on the hospital wards as scheduled.

After a few weeks, the patient decided to try a different version of the medication. She had been on Adderall for years with breaks only for pregnancy and nursing and never had a problem. Without it her A.D.H.D. made the hard work of learning to be a doctor even harder. But when her neutrophils dropped again, she stopped — this time, she figures, for good.

The patient has now turned to cognitive behavioral therapy to help her manage her disorder. She's working hard to come up with systems to help manage the demands of work and family more effectively. She says it's about time she did that anyway. ♦

Garfield Variants

By Dan Brooks



Something about the last few weeks has made me long for a big orange monomaniac to dominate my attention. Maybe he could have a high opinion of himself despite his evident flaws. I would like it if his behavior were both unpredictable and monotonous, repeatedly surprising me with how *himself* he could be. Most important, I want him to come at me every day, in minor variations, through the internet — ideally on Twitter.

If you are troubled by similar appetites, you might try getting into Garfield variants: remixes of the original strips that testify to the internet’s limitless invention and similarly uninhibited

attitude toward copyright. Perhaps the best known is Garfield Minus Garfield, which removes all evidence of the title character to yield a comic about a lonely man talking to himself. Relieved of the pet that is at once his antagonist and his companion, Jon might sit silently for two panels before saying, “I dread tomorrow.” Without Garfield, the strip shifts to a register of psychological realism in which Jon’s circumstances become horror instead of comedy.

Garfield Minus Garfield is the novice’s entry to the genre, the Garfield-variant equivalent of a wine cooler. More refined palates might prefer Pipe Garfield, which

The fat tabby we all know and love can teach you to make peace with a monoculture in decline.

replaces the last panel of every strip with the 1978 sight gag in which Garfield smokes a pipe. Jon asks Garfield what he plans to do with his day: pipe gag. Garfield promises a “brisk walk” and strides out of frame: pipe gag. Garfield is about to kick Odie off the table but pauses to wonder if that would be wrong: pipe gag. While most theories of humor involve the element of surprise, to read Pipe Garfield is to keep encountering what you expect.

What’s strange is that it keeps making sense. Pipe Garfield relies on what cinema theorists call the Kuleshov effect: the tendency of audiences to invent a narrative connection between any two images in

sequence. This phenomenon is the basis for not just modern film editing but also several Garfield variants, including Garfield Thrown Out the Window, which intensifies the Kuleshov effect considerably. The final frame of each strip, in which Garfield's body flies through a pane of broken glass, implies vigorous activity between panels. The difference between Pipe Garfield and Garfield Thrown Out the Window is a matter of existential disposition: Smoking a pipe is something Garfield does, but defenestration is something done to Garfield. Both variants exercise the mind's capacity for sense-making, inviting the reader to devise a story from found materials.

For most people, these two corpora are enough entertainment for a lifetime. Aesthetes can supplement them with the Dali-esque Deflated Garfield (ends with the same panel of Jon shrieking "Speak to me!" at a limp, wrinkled Garfield); the allusive Garfield Censored (arbitrarily censors one panel "due to its graphic nature"); or the bot-operated Garfield Randomized (assembles a strip from three unrelated panels). Those who wish to go further — perhaps to glimpse the very essence of Garfield — might enjoy the animations of panels generated by artificial intelligence, in which the characters become twitching mollusks who speak in clouds of hieroglyphics forever on the verge of becoming "DO" and "THE."

I grew up watching animated Garfield cartoons, both the Saturday-morning "Garfield and Friends" and the prime-time specials that ran every year from 1982 to 1991. I obviously had collections of the strips, but I also had a Garfield plush toy, and my friend had a Garfield toothbrush; I knew the locations of at least two Garfield phones. The sheer ubiquity of Garfield-branded products during the late 20th century led the Licensing Industry Merchandisers' Association to induct Jim Davis into its Hall of Fame in 1993.

In the world of the strip, Garfield is a cat who hates Mondays and likes lasagna, but in our world, he is a brand. The adults who funded my childhood must have recognized something crass in his relentless marketing, but I was just happy to get more iterations of a character that I loved. Little did I know that iteration would become the dominant model of 21st-century entertainment: beloved intellectual property endlessly spun off,

To learn to enjoy Garfield variants is to learn to find meaning even where it appears in only trace amounts.

Dan Brooks writes essays, fiction and commentary from Missoula, Mont.

rebooted and crossed over; culture not as a series of works but as a constellation of reliable draws.

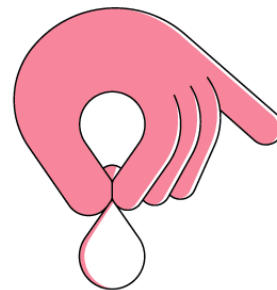
It is true that I am getting older, but it is also true that culture can get worse: less surprising, more reliant on references and brands, familiar to the point of revulsion. I worry that I have witnessed these changes in my short lifetime, although I cannot really know. As a hedge against uncertainty, Garfield variants offer a course of conditioning. To consume them is to become a kind of aesthetic Spartan, training yourself to survive in an environment that offers less and less comfort. Once you've learned to experience the pipe gag as the satisfying outcome of any two events, sitting

through another "Avengers" movie feels easy. These algorithmically modified reruns of decades-old cartoons sharpen the skills we will need to find meaning in a potentially more disordered future.

There may come a day when we long for the sophistication of newspaper comic strips. The prospect saddens me, but somewhere during the second hour of Pipe Garfield, I experience a sense of overwhelming determination. It's the same feeling I get when I walk past the six-month supply of emergency food in Costco. I will ready myself for what is coming. If the past was a soft bed, culturally speaking, then Garfield variants are the rough blanket that prepares us to sleep on the floor. That's what I tell myself, anyway. ♦

Tip By Malia Wollan

How to Donate Breast Milk



"Donor milk can make the difference between life and death for preterm infants," says Mary Michael Kelley, who in 2011 had a baby daughter die after 12 harrowing days in neonatal intensive care. A bereavement nurse called her shortly after, asking what she wanted to do with the 80 ounces of pumped milk she'd been collecting in the hospital freezer. She soon found out that Alabama, where she lives, didn't have a milk bank. Four years later, she opened the Mothers' Milk Bank of Alabama inside the food bank in Birmingham, where she was executive director. "We made a commitment to feed the community," she says. "That means everybody, including babies."

To donate milk, you obviously need to be lactating. Never give away nourishment your own child needs. Milk banks

are looking for frozen, excess milk. The amount of milk that people produce varies widely. Unsurprisingly, banks covet those whom Kelley calls superproducers. "One woman brought in well over a thousand ounces of milk a month," she says. Generally, banks will want you to donate at least 100 ounces, although there are exceptions. "A bereaved mother can bring in one bottle of milk if she wants," Kelley says.

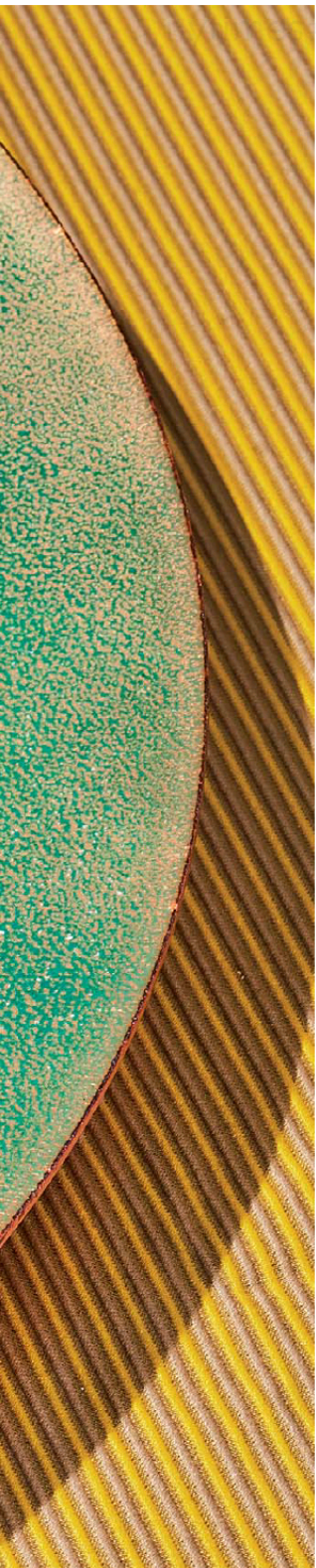
You have choices about how to get your milk out to babies other than your own, including selling it or giving it away online. But if your aim is to help the babies most in need, Kelley suggests donating to a nonprofit milk bank like the one she founded, which will pool, pasteurize and distribute the milk mostly to hospitals. Human milk lowers the risk of necrotizing enterocolitis, an intestinal disease that is a leading cause of death in N.I.C.U.s.

Find your nearest nonprofit bank on the website of the Human Milk Banking Association of North America. Once you've connected with a bank, a donor coordinator will ask about your health history. Some medications, and recent smoking, will disqualify you. You'll need to take a blood test to check for diseases that could potentially be transmitted through milk, including H.I.V., hepatitis B and C and syphilis. When your frozen milk is ready, ship it overnight or drop it off at a bank's depot. "What are you getting out of it?" Kelley asks. "The knowledge that you're potentially saving a life." ♦

A Brazilian Treat: Brigadeiros are sweet, fudgy and perfect for home cooks in a hurry. Keep them in your freezer to eat anytime.



Pereira may be a professional, but she still makes brigadeiros the way she learned as a child.



When **Natalia Pereira** was a girl in Minas Gerais, Brazil, her mother, Francisca, gave her a few bricks and some empty, washed-out sardine cans to build herself a toy kitchen. Pereira loved it. She played by cooking rice and beans over hot coals, while her mother worked at the wood stove, simmering meat and bones for broth, or warming up water for bath time. “We were poor, but we had chickens, and we knew how to make everything,” Pereira says. “My mother’s hair always smelled like the fireplace.”

Francisca cooked every meal, every day, at home — stews, cornbread, potpies and, on special occasions like Pereira’s birthday, candy. Francisca would reduce milk until it became thick and creamy, adding sugar and cocoa powder. She would then shape the mixture by hand, rolling each bonbon in cocoa powder. “It wasn’t fancy,” Pereira says. “And it wasn’t the most brilliant shape, but it was exquisite.” Pereira remembers the fudgy candies as somewhere between chewy and soft, between bittersweet and sweet. *Brigadeiros* are said to be named for an Air Force brigadier who ran for president of Brazil in the 1940s, and they became a popular national sweet as shelf-stable condensed milk became more widely available. Home cooks in a hurry could make a luxurious treat with little more than a knob of butter, canned sweetened condensed milk and cocoa.

“It’s about doing it with what you have,” says Pereira, who left home in her 20s and came to the United States, where she eventually started earning money by cooking the Brazilian food she learned to make from Francisca. She worked as a private chef and later opened her restaurant, Woodspoon, in Los Angeles. Pereira may be a professional, but she still makes *brigadeiros* the way she learned as a child. Sometimes she uses canned milk, and sometimes she makes her own sweetened condensed milk, simmering whole milk with sugar until it’s shiny and yellow. Pereira dissolves cocoa powder into the milk, then turns up the heat, stirring and stirring until the texture of the mass starts to change. “You can see the shine, the long lines and the beautiful body,” she says. “It makes little peaks and pulls in a certain way.” The chocolate mix starts to move as a whole, slipping away from the bottom of the pot, and when that happens, it’s just about ready.

Pastry chefs might use a thermometer to find this moment, but Francisca never did, and neither does Pereira. “You see and feel the texture change, and you just know,” she says. (If in doubt, you can also take a small spoonful of the mix and run it under cold water to help determine where it’s at. When it’s cool enough to touch, it should hold its shape when you squish it, just like a soft caramel.)

Off the heat, Pereira shapes the finished mix into little balls or rough cubes, using buttered palms and fingertips. Like Francisca, she rolls them in cocoa, or shaved bittersweet chocolate, to offset the sweetness of the candy, though sometimes she’ll cover them in colorful sprinkles, dried coconut or finely crushed nuts. Francisca taught her something else: to scrape any remaining chocolate out of the pot with a wooden spoon and then clean the pot and spoon a second time with a rinse of hot milk, making a delicious hot chocolate in the process — washing the sides of the pot, getting to any remaining *brigadeiro* mix, wasting nothing, extracting every last bit of sweetness.

Working in the United States, using all of the lessons she gleaned from Francisca, Pereira saved up enough to build her mother a small house in Brazil, complete with all the luxuries they didn’t have when she was growing up — running water, electricity, a modern kitchen. But on Pereira’s way back to Brazil to surprise her mother with the gift, Francisca died. Now, for Pereira, making *brigadeiros* is a way to remember Francisca again and again — her ingenuity, her sweetness, her patience. “She was my model for what a woman, a mother, a person should be,” says Pereira, who always keeps *brigadeiros* in the freezer, ready anytime she needs something sweet. “For me, it’s paradise, knowing they’re there. It’s a little bit of home.”

Brigadeiros

Time: 1½ hours, plus cooling

For the sweetened condensed milk (optional):

- 5 cups whole milk
- 1 cup granulated sugar

For the *brigadeiros*:

- 2 teaspoons unsalted butter, plus more for greasing your hands
- 1¾ cups homemade sweetened condensed milk or 1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk

- 5 tablespoons unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder, sifted
- Pinch of flaky sea salt
- 1 cup chocolate or rainbow sprinkles

1. If using store-bought condensed milk, skip to Step 2. If making the sweetened condensed milk from scratch, add the milk and sugar to a large saucepan. Heat over medium-low, and simmer, stirring occasionally and scraping the sides and bottom of the pan with a spatula, for about 30–40 minutes. When the milk reduces to about 1¾ cups, thickens to a syrup texture and turns slightly yellow, it is ready.

2. Prepare the *brigadeiros*: Melt the butter in a heavy skillet over low heat. Add the condensed milk, cocoa powder and salt, and whisk until no trace of cocoa remains, about 5 minutes.

3. Turn the heat up to medium, and use a heatproof spatula to stir the mixture constantly until it becomes thick and shiny and pulls away from the bottom of the pan as a mass when you drag the spatula across it, about 7 minutes. If you’re not sure if the mixture is ready, take ½ a teaspoon of it and run under cold water; then when it’s cool enough to touch, squish it with your fingers — it should be the texture of a soft and fudgy caramel.

4. Scrape all of the mixture onto a piece of parchment paper, and let cool down until it’s easy to handle, about 30 minutes. Lightly butter your hands, and use them to shape a scant tablespoon of the mixture into a ball or rough cube, then roll it in the sprinkles. Place each one on a paper wrapper, if you like. The *brigadeiros* will keep in the fridge for a week, or in the freezer for a month. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

Yield: Approximately 24 pieces.

Adapted from Natalia Pereira. ♦

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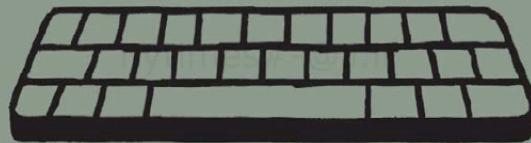
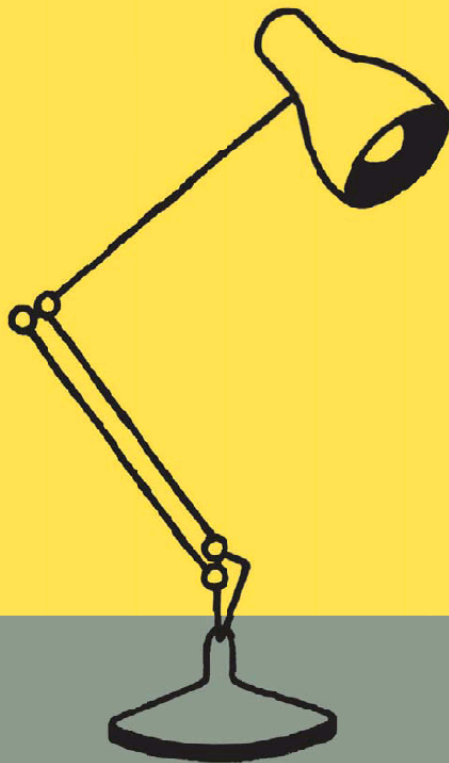
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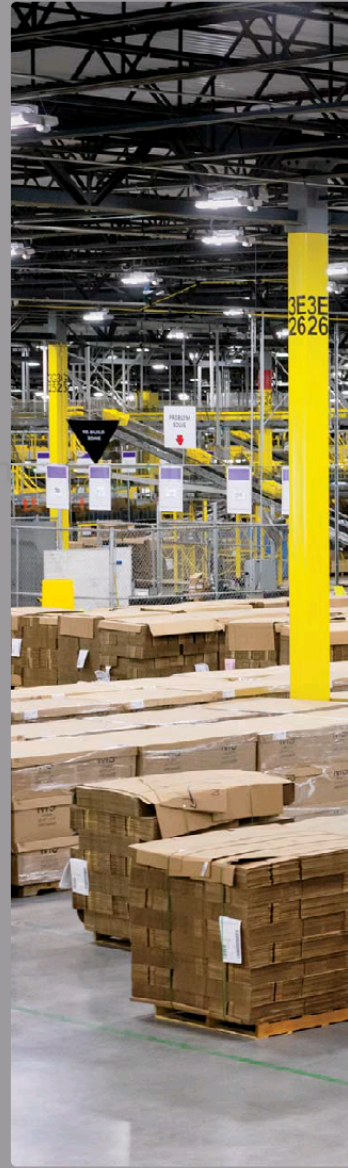
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THE
AMAZON
AWAKENING

BY
ERIKA HAYASAKI

The Future
Of Work





COVID-19 HAS CEMENTED THE E-COMMERCE GIANT'S HOLD ON THE ECONOMY — BUT IT HAS ALSO SPURRED EMPLOYEES ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY TO ORGANIZE.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY REUBEN COX AND KEVIN COOLEY



hen Abdul Tokhi, a father of two small children, arrived in the United States from Afghanistan in 2017, a local church group helped him and his family find an apartment in Corona, a city in California's Inland Empire — a 27,000-square-mile stretch of deserts, mountains, farmland and sprawling housing communities east of Los Angeles. The group collected furniture donations, bringing over sofas, tables and a bulky, outdated television. They also connected him to a hiring company, which landed him a job as a “picker” in an Amazon warehouse, a 12-mile drive from Corona in a town named Eastvale. He started at Amazon earning \$12.25 an hour, while his wife stayed home to take care of the kids.

In Afghanistan, Tokhi worked in construction and shipping, which sometimes involved transporting money to the bank for a contractor. “They paid cash, so it was very dangerous,” he said. “You could get robbed.” He felt safe at Amazon, and benefits were good. After a year, Tokhi got a raise to \$15 an hour, along with the rest of the company's starting-wage employees around the country. He also enrolled in computer-science classes at a local community college. By 2019, he was still pulling items off shelves and preparing them for shipment. Being a picker required a strong back and the ability to lift up to 50 pounds. His rent was \$1,480 a month, and after that was paid, there was barely enough for gas, food and cellphone bills. “The work is hard,” he said at the time. “But I don't care. I have a job. A good salary.” Tokhi made his first American friends in the warehouse lunchrooms.

Nowhere in the nation is the astonishing rise of Amazon more evident than in the Inland Empire, whose two counties, San Bernardino and Riverside, are now home to 4.6 million people. The first Amazon warehouse, known as ONT2, landed there like a spaceship in 2012, with fewer than 3,000 employees. Since then, Amazon has become the largest private employer in the region, with 14 facilities and two logistics air hubs. The

company's swishy logo flashes past on vans and trucks and passes overhead on planes. In the Inland Empire, more than 40,000 people now work for Amazon warehouses as pickers, packers, sorters, unloaders and managers, as well as independent drivers, contract truckers, pilots and aircraft technicians. The company is so enmeshed in the community that it can simultaneously be a TV channel, grocery store, home security system, boss, personal data collector, high school career track, internet cloud provider and personal assistant.

By late March 2020, Gov. Gavin Newsom of California had issued a statewide stay-at-home order. Unemployment rates across the Inland Empire climbed as businesses shut down. A few miles from the Eastvale facility, retail stores once bustling with customers, including T.J. Maxx, Kohl's and HomeGoods, began furloughing employees. Restaurants, hotel rooms and theaters across the region sat empty. But Amazon announced national plans to hire 100,000 workers to meet customer demand, as toilet paper and bleach flew off shelves. It temporarily raised starting-wage pay by \$2 an hour, offered sign-on bonuses and beefed up grocery delivery services. The company added 22,000 new employees in California, with more than 8,000 of them working in the Inland Empire.

Unemployed retail workers in the region became increasingly reliant on Amazon for steady income, which meant adjusting to a warehouse culture hyperoptimized for efficient logistics. In his Eastvale warehouse, LGB3, Tokhi noticed a surge of new employees. The faces he was used to seeing on each shift were gone. Were people staying home out of fear of contracting the virus, he wondered? Were they sick themselves? Many of his colleagues shared his uncertainty and turned to Facebook for answers. Tokhi, like other Amazon workers, changed his profile picture to include an orange circle that read: “I CAN'T STAY HOME. . . IWORKATAMAZON.”

On Saturday, March 28, on a private Facebook group for Amazon warehouse workers, a member asked if anyone had heard about an employee from LGB3 who had tested positive for the coronavirus: “I mean a solid confirmation,” the member wrote, “like a news article or anything from a reliable source.”

“I've only heard the person is being tested, nothing confirmed yet,” another member replied. “If anyone knows different, let me know cause I didn't go in on Wednesday after I'd been told.”

On a Facebook group for the Inland Empire called IE Amazonians Unite, a petition posted specifically for the employees of the Eastvale warehouse demanded that “the facility must be shut down for a minimum of two weeks.” The petition also pushed for paid leave while the facility was sterilized, free worker testing for the virus, hazard pay, child-care pay and subsidies.

As the number of coronavirus cases in warehouses across the region climbed, concerns about job safety and quality took on a new urgency. One woman wrote: “I work at LGB3 and already signed. I have a 9-month-old and rent from my parents. My father is a Stage 4 cancer patient survivor. His immune system is very weak. He almost died of pneumonia last year.” She continued: “I'm really concerned with how Amazon seems to be doing the bare minimum with protecting us from Covid-19. All these new hires coming into the building are having to huddle together next to their trainers to hear them over the machinery.”

Amazon offered unpaid time off for those concerned about coming to work. Another commenter wrote: “This is bs we should be paid for two weeks. They should have it sanitized. Our lives matter too.”

' WE 'VE GOT THIS KIND OF PERMANENT UNDERCLASS OF WORKING PEOPLE THAT ARE ALWAYS ON THE BUBBLE, WHETHER THEY'RE TEMPS AT THE WAREHOUSES OR AMAZON WORKERS. '

THE

pandemic has upended entire segments of the economy, furloughing hotel and convention-center workers, docking cruise ships, gutting mom-and-pop restaurants, devastating the airline industry and crushing local businesses like salons, gyms and child recreation centers. Some of those industries may take years to return to a prepandemic normal. Others will take longer to recover, if they ever do. As millions of people filed for unemployment, Amazon's profits skyrocketed, leading to a hiring spree of warehouse workers, engineers and couriers.

Between January and October of last year, Amazon added 427,300 employees globally. It reportedly planned to put 1,000 new small facilities in suburbs across the United States to meet same-day shipping demands, and to hire thousands more grocery workers for Amazon Fresh. No other company in history — including Walmart, the largest private employer — has ever added so many workers in a single year. As of December, Amazon employed 1.3 million people worldwide. In the fourth quarter of 2020, it generated \$125.6 billion in net sales, its largest quarterly revenue of all time.

In places like the Inland Empire, openings for warehouse pickers and sorters became seemingly infinite. For many workers who were juggling multiple jobs to make ends meet before Covid, Amazon suddenly became their sole source of income. Many of the jobs were physically demanding, with quotas dictating output. Some workers skip bathroom breaks or suffer injuries in order to scan upwards of 300 items per hour. The positions come with health benefits and a 401(k), but employee turnover is so high that many people don't make it long enough to collect.

As the pandemic set in, local online job boards filled up with Amazon-related posts: “Warehouse Team Member — Earn up to \$600 a Week.” “Delivery Driver — Immediate Hire.” “Area Manager, Amazon (Military Veterans Encouraged to Apply).” “It really does feel like



you're going to end up at Amazon and you don't have much of a choice," said Sheheryar Kaosji, executive director of the Warehouse Worker Resource Center, which is based in the Inland Empire. If not Amazon, you may "end up at another warehouse that is cuing its standards off of Amazon."

New hires took to the Facebook message boards, seeking advice. Some, who before the pandemic worked in the food and retail industries, needed help managing the physical toll that came with repetitive bending, squatting, lifting and trekking miles of warehouse floors. "They are reaching down for boxes all day. Bending in ways they are not used to, and all of the sudden,

bam," said Brian Freeman, a workers' compensation lawyer in the Inland Empire who has represented 78 Amazon employees. "They break. Their neck, their back, their arms, something goes out." Veteran workers offered suggestions based on their own routines, including buying shoes with memory foam, wearing compression socks (two pairs for more cushion) and taking ibuprofen (before shifts, again on breaks and after work). They recommended turmeric for inflammation, warm baths of Epsom salt, at-home foot-relief remedies and essential-oil rollers for sore muscles. They shared links for orthopedic shoes and heated massagers.

As warehouse workers started getting sick, conversations online turned fearful, echoing sentiments on the ground. "They didn't inform us about our second case until over

two weeks after they reported," one member wrote in the Amazon Facebook worker group. "We now have a third case and it's getting closer to two weeks and we still haven't been informed. If it wasn't for us sharing info in our own Facebook group, we wouldn't even have known."

But something unexpected happened, too: Those who might not have complained about working conditions or considered themselves activists started speaking up. Amazon had long fended off workplace organizing, holding anti-union meetings that employees were required to attend. And while Amazon has often acknowledged that workers have the right to unionize, the company has tried to

Photograph by Kevin Cooley/Redux, for The New York Times.
Opening pages: Photographs by Reuben Cox for The New York Times.

An Amazon warehouse in Eastvale, Calif., known as LGB3. Opening pages: Scenes from LGB3, including a coronavirus testing area and an employee at work.

persuade them that doing so would introduce an unnecessary middleman. But Covid-19 proved to be a breaking point. Some workers were no longer willing to make concessions to a company that they felt was jeopardizing their safety and potentially their lives.

"The way they treat us is unethical and unfair," an Amazon employee posted in April, urging workers concerned about their safety to file a complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

"Yea they gave us extra pay unlimited UPT," or unpaid time off, another



The Amazon worker Abdul Tokhi at home with his three children.

wrote, “but be honest to yourself. Is it worth dying for?”

One user in Texas added: “We need to unionize nationwide to have a voice for health and better working conditions.”

Concerned about their own health, some employees at a Staten Island Amazon warehouse walked off the job in March, and the following day, workers at Whole Foods, which is owned by Amazon, participated in a national sickout, demanding more frequent cleanings and paid leave for those under quarantine. One Staten Island employee was fired by Amazon for what he believes was his involvement in helping organize the rally. Amazon claims the worker had broken his paid quarantine leave and says the company has zero tolerance for retaliation against employees.

“Sadly, the question of whether or not I’m risking my life to fulfill an order of a dildo is an actual question people are asking themselves,” said Mario Vasquez, a community organizer for Teamsters Local 1932, which primarily represents public-sector

workers in the Inland Empire. “As crude as that is, it’s a reality. People are becoming aware of this shocking contradiction and asking themselves if it’s worth it.”

One member of the Amazon Warehouse Associates Facebook group posted an article about workers at an Amazon fulfillment center in Italy who successfully negotiated for new safety measures and an additional daily break. “Too bad they didn’t ask for more money, but at least they stood up for themselves,” he wrote. Another person posted: “Too many scared folk are more than happy to accept garbage because the powers that be have convinced them that they have no power.” The member continued: “There are hundreds of thousands of us ... and only a handful of executives ... just sayin.”

Last spring, workers walked out at Amazon facilities in New York, Detroit and Illinois. Beginning April 21, Amazon warehouse workers nationwide started a “mass call out,” in which more than 300 people across at least 50 facilities called in

sick. And on April 24, in protest of the company’s treatment of warehouse employees and the firing of certain workers, Amazon tech employees hosted a sickout.

In the coming weeks, roughly 6,000 Amazon workers in Alabama will begin tallying the votes on whether to form the first U.S. union of its kind in the company’s 25-year history. Even if they do, though, the question remains: Will the unprecedented unrest caused by Covid-19 turn into a durable movement inside the company? “We have seen a surge in organizing,” said Ellen Reese, a professor of sociology at the University of California, Riverside, who is studying Amazon warehouse employees in the Inland Empire. But it’s uncertain whether that will lead to a surge of unionization, she added, because even the company’s long-time employees are often one wrong move away from losing their jobs. “Workers get fired very easily over small things, or not making rates, or too much time off task,” she said.

This precariousness is clear in the Inland Empire, where Amazon has hired an additional 7,500 seasonal employees since October. “We’ve got this kind of permanent underclass of working people that are always on the bubble, whether they’re temps at the warehouses or Amazon workers,” Kaoosji said. “There’s always this pool of people who are one step behind you. So, if you speak up or if you organize, there’s a hundred temp workers right outside the door who would be able to take your job.”

I

n 2016 — the same year that Amazon announced plans to open its first distribution center in Eastvale — the city had nearly 64,000 residents and was growing fast. Money magazine reported at the time that Eastvale felt like a “shiny new toy.” The out-of-reach home prices of Los Angeles and Orange County are what took me and my own growing family there in 2018. At that point Eastvale was less than a decade old, having been founded and incorporated in 2010 on former agricultural land. It had become a

community with good, diverse schools, its neighborhoods filled with big beige houses, solar panels and nearly identical cul-de-sacs. “I live over there,” my daughter would say, pointing down one street. “No, wait, I live over there,” and she would point to an entirely different block. An overwhelming majority of residents are not employed by Amazon. But people from elsewhere in the Inland Empire commute to Eastvale to work there.

The Eastvale facilities have more than 6,000 employees (and nearly 1,000 robots) and are among the largest Amazon centers in the world. Long before Covid, safety issues proliferated. A public-records request of 911 calls showed that in April 2017, an employee received what appeared to be a concussion after she “had a large box fall on her head.” The following year, a 20-year-old employee hit her head while fainting and fell unconscious. Two weeks later, a man in his mid-30s was trapped between two machines on the production floor. “Subject has broken leg,” the 911 records stated. He was stuck in the “pit machine.”

AmCare, the in-house Amazon first-aid facility, is often filled with employees laid out on their backs, soothing their muscles with menthol pain spray or heating pads, popping ibuprofen or doing stretches, according to Allatha Faruq, who worked at the Eastvale warehouse in 2018. Faruq found herself in so much back pain that she became a regular at AmCare. In the clinic, she looked around at her co-workers and realized, “This is a theme.” Each time she went to AmCare, she saw different employees with different ailments, most of whom she’d never met before. “You start realizing just how many people get hurt.”

Freeman, the workers’ comp attorney, took on his first Amazon case in the Inland Empire in 2014. As warehouses continued to open, he noticed a steady uptick in calls from injured Amazon employees. When his clients got hurt, Freeman said, they were instructed to “go in-house first,” where its emergency medical technicians assessed and documented the severity of their injuries and

Photograph by Reuben Cox for The New York Times

then recommended whether an outside doctor was necessary.

There have been 301 federal investigations initiated against Amazon since 2012, resulting in 59 workplace violations. Cal/OSHA investigated 37 Amazon cases in California and found 12 violations, but the state agency is facing criticism for not doing enough to count and investigate coronavirus cases in California workplaces. A report last year from Reveal, citing company data obtained by the Center for Investigative Reporting, looked at more than 150 Amazon facilities nationwide and found that injury rates in 2018 and 2019 at the Eastvale facility where Tokhi worked were more than four times the national average.

By late March, Amazon confirmed that an Eastvale warehouse worker had tested positive for the coronavirus. That evening, the company notified its workers of a second case. New rules were enforced: Stay six feet apart, stagger lunches and breaks, use Clorox wipes for stations. Soon the company would begin taking temperatures.

By the time Tokhi heard about the second case, he felt scared and unprotected. He even worried that he might be getting sick. Tokhi went to AmCare and was greeted by two medical staff members in masks. “Can you please give me a mask?” he asked.

Tokhi said he was informed that they did not have masks for all staff members — only for the medical personnel. “We are not human?” Tokhi wanted to ask. But he kept his thoughts to himself. “Just you are human? You use the mask, and for us, no?”

He did not trust that there were only two confirmed Covid cases in the Eastvale distribution hub. “Somebody told me seven people,” he said. “We don’t know. Someone told me it’s five people.” Workers continued to speculate.

The company said that it informs employees when a worker tests positive and regularly conducts deep cleanings, but Tokhi was skeptical at the time. Did it matter how much they cleaned if the virus was in the air? He wiped down his workstation, careful not to miss any areas he might touch, and scrubbed all buttons and screens. “About one meter around,” he said, “I clean myself.”

EASTVALE

Residents spent a year fighting the development of the Amazon warehouses. They pointed to the community surrounding the San Bernardino airport, which has long suffered dangerous levels of air quality — much of the pollution now emanating from trucks and trains packed with Amazon-related cargo. Last February, the state attorney general filed a lawsuit over the expansion of the San Bernardino airport to accommodate a 660,000-square-foot logistics hub, arguing that the project would bring more pollution. The suit is pending in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Despite those efforts, the first Amazon warehouse appeared practically overnight. Neighbors watched giant bulldozers and cranes hoist walls into place. The entire tilt-up operation happened over a single noisy weekend, the panels lining up like colossal dominoes. Soon after, a twin warehouse was built next door. Visible from Interstate 15, which cuts through the Inland Empire, the conjoined Eastvale fulfillment centers gleam — two million square feet encased in gray and lime green slabs. “Most of my friends, before I ran for office, did not even know where Eastvale is,” said the city’s mayor, Jocelyn Yow. She learned to describe Eastvale using Amazon as a landmark.

Over the years, Eastvale’s grazing cows were replaced with neat rows of homes, many with Amazon-owned Ring doorbells and Alexa devices. In 2017, Lennar, one of the nation’s largest home builders, teamed up with Amazon and is currently selling smart homes in 51 communities in the Inland Empire. Living in Eastvale meant living with Amazon.

“Amazon, originally, was going to be a boon for Eastvale,” Ike Bootsma, a former mayor of the town, told me when explaining why city officials first welcomed the warehouses. That, in part, was because of a California law passed in 2011 requiring internet retailers like Amazon to collect

state sales tax on items bought by California residents, an initiative the tech giant pushed back against. Recently, the state has been requiring third-party sellers to pay sales taxes too. Those taxes are a multi-million-dollar windfall.

But Eastvale officials told me they hardly see that cash flow. Amazon sales taxes go to the state and are then redistributed back to the counties where the orders were processed. Each county divvies up the money based on a formula. The county of Riverside, home to Eastvale, will allocate funds based on which city brings in the most revenue. Cities with more retail outlets, restaurants, fuel stations and industrial centers tend to generate more taxable sales and receive the largest share of Amazon tax revenue. Since Eastvale is younger, with fewer restaurants and stores, it can’t compete. Only a small amount of Amazon’s tax revenue trickles down. For the third quarter of 2020, Eastvale received 2.9 percent of those funds, according to Amanda Wells, finance director and treasurer for the city. Sales taxes have become especially critical under Proposition 13, which since 1978 has shielded homeowners — but also commercial properties — from property-tax increases.

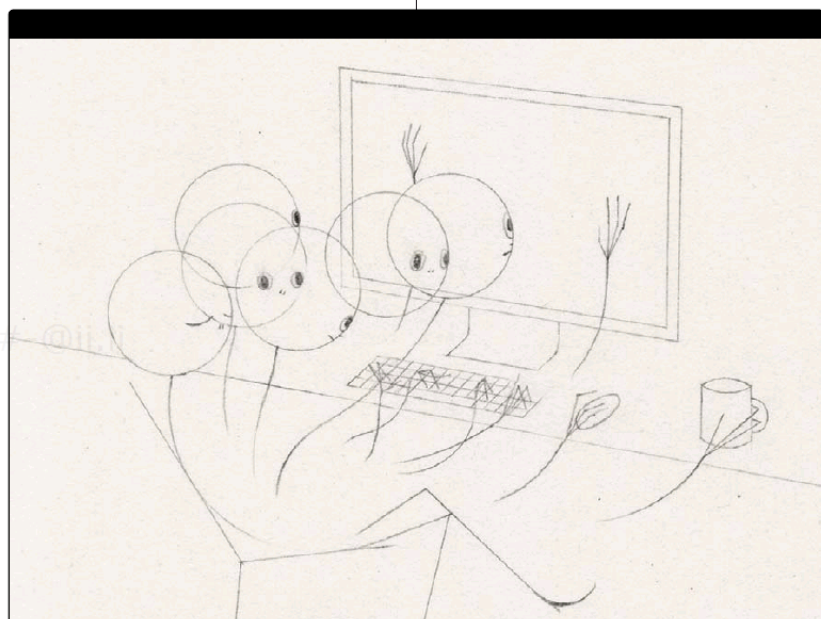
“Honestly it’s only fair for us to get the taxes,” said Todd Rigby, another former Eastvale mayor and a current City Council member. “It’s not like Target or Costco,” whose sales taxes go to the city. Bryan Jones, Eastvale’s city manager, said Amazon has hired local law enforcement on overtime

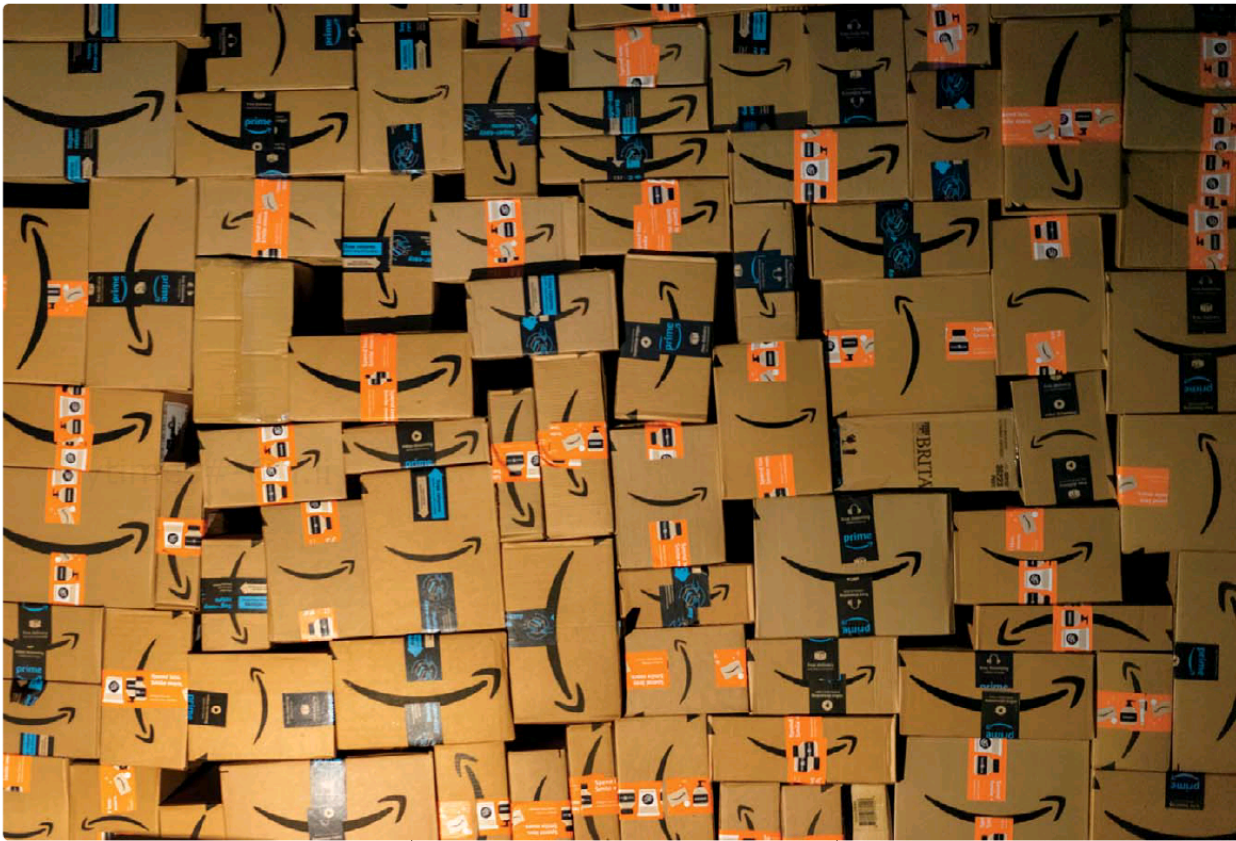
to help alleviate traffic congestion during its peak shipping season. But Rigby and other officials said the city needs money to repair heavily trafficked roads. Amazon, Rigby said, is “utilizing our services but not necessarily paying its fair share.”

Eastvale and its neighboring cities do benefit from the infusion of jobs and tax money, Rigby said. “We have a saying in Eastvale: Their success is our success.” But he is also concerned about what the future will look like across the region as Amazon continues to automate its warehouses. “We approved those projects based on an appreciation that there was going to be employment,” Rigby said. “The more they automate, the less jobs.”

The Industrial Technical Learning Center (InTech) opened in the Inland Empire the same year that Eastvale got its first Amazon facility. Just as the region has become home to Amazon’s warehouses and transportation hubs, it has also become host to a number of schools and programs designed to prepare people for the day when Amazon’s automated factories replace traditional jobs. In one InTech session I visited, students learned how to repair mechanical arms and program machine systems.

“Even though the very entry-level unskilled-labor jobs are going away because of robots, those are the sorts of jobs most people don’t want to stay in for their entire lives,” said Jon Fox, who coordinates workforce training through InTech. The school’s goal is to provide skills to the next generation and teach them





about opportunities in manufacturing and logistics as “good potential long-term careers,” Fox said, “where they can make a good livable wage.” The programming and repair jobs might not replace every job lost to automation, he added, “but there are other jobs around that are being created.”

Amazon officials told me the company encourages these kinds of training programs, as well as initiatives that will help its employees gain the skills to move into other industries, even if that means losing those workers when they land better jobs. In 2019, Amazon announced plans to spend \$700 million to retrain about 100,000 of its 300,000 employees in the United States by 2025. The company has said it hopes to put them on the path to becoming I.T. technicians or coders. But several workers I spoke with who had been employed by Eastvale’s Amazon facilities told me the idea of going back to school to learn new skills, while they are struggling to raise kids and pay bills, was not feasible. These opportunities, they believed, were better for younger, more adaptable employees.

In San Bernardino, roughly 20 miles from the InTech campus, a group of students from Cajon High School recently took classes in the Amazon Logistics and Business Management Pathway, one of eight career tracks offered at the public high school, alongside medicine,

Boxes at LGB3, which is among the largest Amazon warehouses in the world.

human services and building trades. The school’s teenagers are mostly from low- and middle-income families. Many can name friends, family members or neighbors who are or have been employed by Amazon.

Before Covid shut down in-person learning, I visited the campus as a dozen students sat clustered at work tables inside an air-conditioned classroom, which was designed to emulate the inside of an Amazon facility. On one wall, Amazon’s giant logo grinned across a yellow and green banner. The words “CUSTOMER OBSESSION” and “DELIVER RESULTS” were painted against a corporate-style yellow backdrop. On a whiteboard, a teacher had written the words “Logistics Final Project,” and the lesson of the day was on Amazon’s “14 Leadership Principles.” Each teenager wore a company golf shirt emblazoned with the Amazon logo.

Students and staff members expressed pride in being associated with the company. Amazon partnered with the school as part of its five-year anniversary in the

Inland Empire, donating \$50,000 to start the pilot program, the giant sweepstakes-style Amazon check displayed prominently at the classroom entrance. The students had already taken field trips to tour the nearby Amazon warehouse.

The plan, an Amazon spokeswoman told me, is to offer robotics-training mentorships, job-training externships, teacher-training programs and transferable college credits. Some might take the logistics high school experience and end up majoring in business or management in college, which could also help Amazon recruit more homegrown managers. San Bernardino is one of “our most saturated areas for Amazon in the network,” she said. “The students, instead of being educated here and trying to find a job in the L.A. market or somewhere else, they can be educated here and remain here.”

A

mazon’s presence in the Inland Empire is reminiscent of the company towns of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, places dominated by industries like coal, steel, lumber or textiles, in which a corporation could own and oversee an entire community, from its housing to education, health care, stores, parks and churches. In the early 1900s, in Austin, Minn., a town that grew up around its

meatpacking industry, Hormel exerted “authority over everything from workers’ family problems to their choices in the voting booth,” writes Hardy Green, in his book “The Company Town.” Hershey, Pa., built by the chocolate mogul Milton S. Hershey in the early 1900s, offered appealing homes, a golf course, a zoo, banks, public schools and a junior college with free tuition for residents.

In company towns of the past, Green writes, a “business exerts a Big Brother-like grip over the population — controlling or even taking the place of government, collecting rents on company-owned housing, dictating buying habits (possibly at the company store), even administering where people worship and how they may spend their leisure time.” One of Hershey’s most celebrated sites was the Hershey Industrial School for orphan boys, supported by a trust that held all of his company stock; after graduation, each student received \$100 and help with finding a job or a college scholarship. Although the school’s financing “was certainly charitable,” Green writes, the trust was “unlikely to disagree with Milton Hershey about the direction of his company.”

Throughout history, and especially during the Great Depression, company towns also became central hubs for labor movements. In 1936, General Motors, with its main plants in Flint, Mich., was the biggest automaker and the most profitable company in America. It had 262,000 employees at 57 plants across North America. In his book, “There Is Power in a Union,” Philip Dray writes that Flint “had long been a company town — its workers, elected officials and even its daily press loyal to the town’s majority employer.” The General Motors president at the time “may not have fully grasped the extent to which the individuals who manned the assembly lines in the big auto plants had grown frustrated by the increasing levels of automation and the speedups that disregarded their needs as human beings.”

Photograph by Reuben Cox for The New York Times

On Dec. 30, 1936, workers at two G.M. Fisher Body plants in Flint “simply stopped working” during a peak busy season, according to Dray. This strike “would be the first large-scale use of the sit-down, a tactic to which automobile assembly lines were especially vulnerable because manufacturing in the auto industry was based on the continuous flow of production.”

Like the Depression-era strikes in those G.M. plants, today’s labor movement has been fueled by a national crisis. Reese, of U.C. Riverside, led a team of students in interviewing 47 former and current Amazon employees throughout the Inland Empire about living and working conditions. When the pandemic began, Reese noticed labor activity spike in ways that mirrored historical patterns. Even when unemployment was at a high during the Great Depression, people were still organizing, “despite the risks of getting fired and replaced.”

The first-ever unionization vote at an Amazon warehouse in the United States involved a small group of employees in Delaware in 2014 — they overwhelmingly voted against it. Amazon said employees preferred to have a direct connection to the company. Labor representatives said it was a result of union suppression efforts and management pressure.

In previous years, the Inland Empire Teamsters Local 1932 received calls from Amazon employees seeking to unionize, but efforts fizzled before they could get off the ground. As discussions of organizing have popped up on the Amazon-worker Facebook groups, users heatedly debate one another. Some urge their peers to stick up for themselves, while others snap back that a union won’t improve their lives.

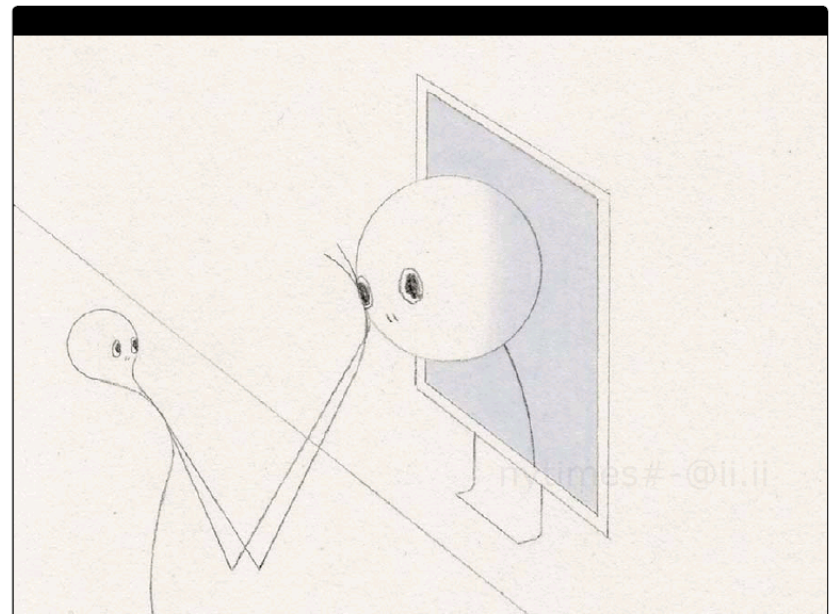
The company’s own anti-union efforts have become more serious in recent months. Last year, Amazon posted job listings for intelligence analysts who would keep track of “labor organizing threats.” The company swiftly expunged the listings, stating it advertised incorrectly. In April, a report surfaced about Whole Foods using heat-map technology to track labor activities among its

employees. On the Amazon warehouse-worker Facebook chats, one employee recently shared a screenshot of a text message, which she believed came from Amazon, though when I called the phone number it was disconnected: “You have the right to refuse to sign anything you are not comfortable signing. When you sign a union card or complete an online authorization form, you are committing to having the union act as your sole representative. We want to caution you, you will be giving up your right to speak for yourself.”

Yet nationwide, many workers were shrugging off anti-union sentiments to express their dissatisfaction with the company. Kaoosji, of the Warehouse Worker Resource Center, said labor organizations were increasingly fielding inquiries from Amazon workers concerned about their health and safety: “We don’t know what’s going on with giving us gloves or masks. We want to know what our rights are. How do we protect ourselves?” Kaoosji said employees were not getting answers or support, which compelled them to take more aggressive action. His group helped file a complaint on their behalf with Cal/OSHA to investigate safety and Covid protocols at the Eastvale warehouse. Workers in an Amazon warehouse in Hawthorne, Calif., followed suit.

The Eastvale warehouse complaint took the company to task for not doing enough to enforce social-distancing measures or protect employees from the virus, noting that many workers were allowed only one antimicrobial cleaning wipe per shift and had to “sanitize equipment themselves that was touched by other workers on previous shifts, including scanners, touch screens, keyboards, carts and other warehouse equipment.” The complaint pointed out that employees in Eastvale were not provided with disposable gloves and that until the week of April 6, warehouse workers did not receive face masks unless they had reported being sick.

More than 400 workers at the Eastvale warehouse signed the petition by Amazonians United demanding better conditions. They listed their



WFH

BY SARA HAGALE

first names only: Akemi, Alberto, Andrea, Brandon, Bryan, Carissa, Christian, Derek, Destiny, Esmerelda, Essence, Faith, Faye, Freddy, Guadalupe, Gwendolyn, Hector, Hollie, Iesha, Iris. ...

As lawsuits were filed and petitions were signed, workers began walking out of warehouses across the country. In October, nearly three dozen Amazon employees in Minnesota walked off their jobs to protest the firing of a colleague who had been vocal about wanting improved warehouse conditions. The Minnesota warehouse was the first known group in the United States to get Amazon management to negotiate and has since become the site of protests.

In November, the “Make Amazon Pay” coalition, a group made up of workers, activists and politicians, unveiled a list of demands on its website: better safety and pay for workers, a stop to surveillance, a commitment to zero emissions by 2030, the abolishment of Amazon Web Service contracts with fossil-fuel companies and an end to ties with police departments and immigration authorities. It also demanded that Amazon employees be allowed to organize and that the company pay its full share of taxes. The following week, it posted an open letter to Jeff Bezos, Amazon’s founder and chief executive, signed by 401 politicians from 34 countries.

It was around this time that the union efforts in Alabama were gaining traction. Last summer, the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union began hearing from

Amazon employees at a new facility in Bessemer, a working-class suburb of Birmingham. Stuart Appelbaum, president of the union, said Amazon workers expressed concern over the brutal pace of work, the risk of injuries, Covid-19 health and safety concerns and the combined stress and strain of the job. The summer’s Black Lives Matter protests were a factor, too: Many employees of the Bessemer facility are Black, as are most of the union drive’s local leaders. “They were fed up with how they were being treated, their basic humanity,” Appelbaum said. By mid-January, the workers and volunteers had gathered 3,000 cards with signatures in support of unionizing.

In recent weeks, Appelbaum has seen images of anti-union propaganda posted inside bathrooms and said the company is distributing “Vote No” buttons to employees. Amazon set up an anti-union site, DoItWithoutDues.com, and unsuccessfully pushed for in-person voting. But despite these tactics and a scarcity of other jobs, Alabama workers continued to move toward unionizing. “Imagine how bad it must be for people to want to come over and support this organizing effort, given everything,” Appelbaum said.

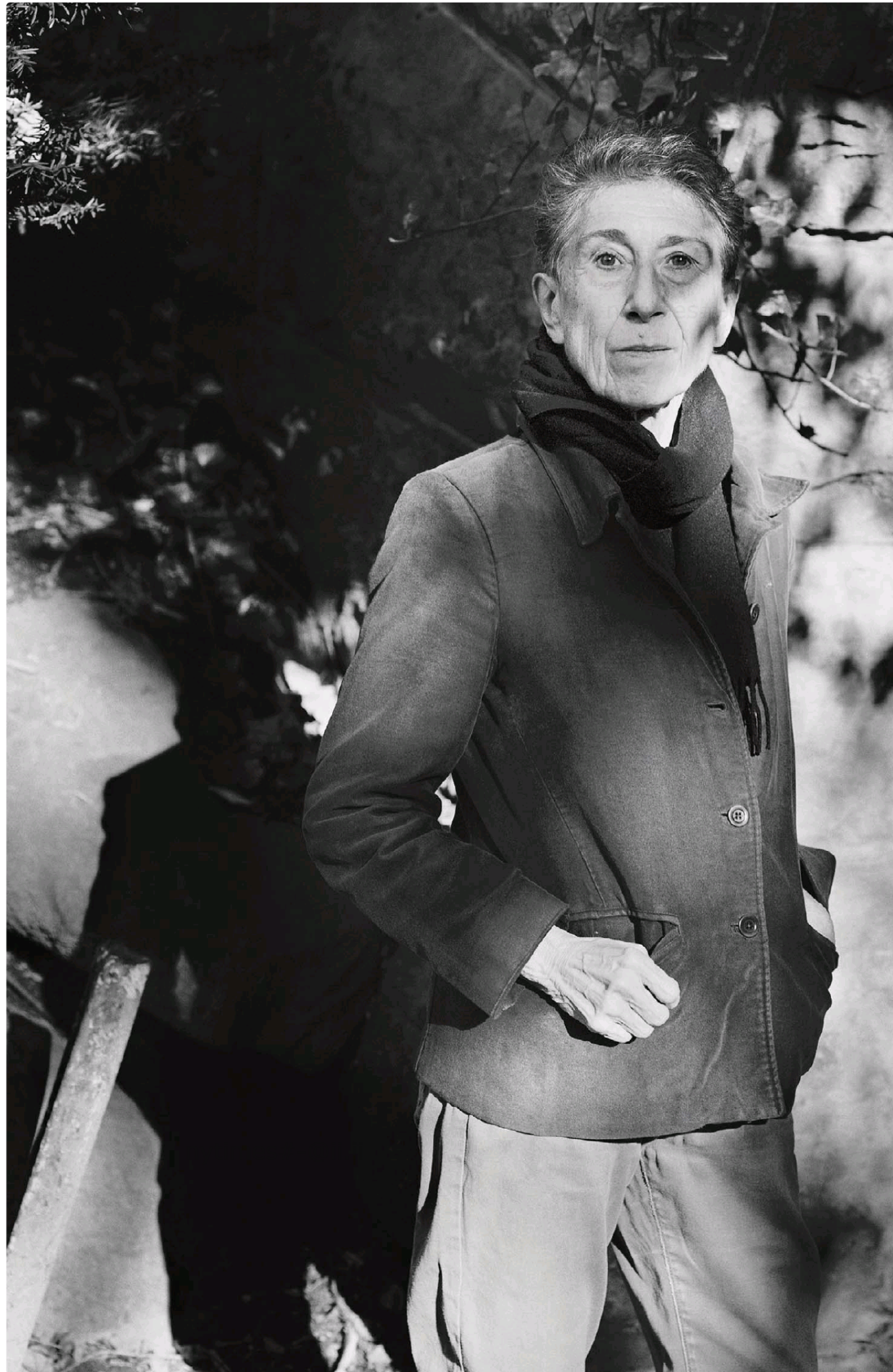
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the surge of political consciousness has been remarkable to watch nationwide, it has been even more remarkable to see up close, in individual workers. I had been talking to Tokhi since March (Continued on Page 61)

The New York
Times Magazine

P. 34

PHOTOGRAPH
BY
SHARIF HAMZA





THE
WAGES
OF
HOUSEWORK

FOR DECADES,
SILVIA
FEDERICI
HAS ARGUED THAT
DOMESTIC LABOR
SHOULD BE
WORTH MUCH MORE.
THE PANDEMIC
HAS
PROVED HER
RIGHT.

The Future
Of Work

2.21.21

BY
JORDAN KISNER

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nytimes.com

rospect Park in May is a commotion of beauty: meadows and dense rambles, hills and hollows, everything covered in chokeberries, spicebush, violets, flowering hawthorns, magnolias and lindens. In this splendor the birds are boisterous, as are the people. But last May, the park was quieter than usual, and the people moving through it had a subdued, worried energy. Many wore masks; many did not. Occasionally someone shouted at someone else for coming too close. There was both fear of breathing common air and a desperate craving for it. Through this scene proceeded, at an energetic pace, Silvia Federici, the 78-year-old scholar and theorist of domestic labor, one of the most influential socialist feminist thinkers of the last century.

Federici had a black scarf tied over her nose and mouth, and she was wearing a delicate blue sweater her mother made long ago. Federici walks all the way around Prospect Park at least once every day, even in the winter, with her partner of 47 years, the philosopher George Caffentzis. (Caffentzis learned he had Parkinson's disease a few years

ago, she explained, and the walking helps him stay well.) But for several days in May, she agreed to do a second daily walk with me.

I had asked to meet because the pandemic and its cascade of economic, social and political breakdowns had led to a profusion of Federician thinking in places I had never encountered it before. Suddenly notions and phrases from her work were all over my social media feeds, op-ed pages and exchanges with friends, as people confronted what kinds of labor are considered essential and why. Federici is a longtime advocate of the idea that domestic work is unwaged labor and was a founder of the Wages for Housework movement in the early 1970s. It is a form of gendered economic oppression, she argues, and an exploitation upon which all of capitalism rests.

As a scholar and activist, Federici is one of a cohort of thinkers who have, for decades, critiqued the way capitalist societies fail to acknowledge or support what she calls "reproductive labor." She uses this term not simply to refer to having children and raising them; it indicates all the work we do that is sustaining — keeping ourselves and others around us well, fed, safe, clean, cared for, thriving. It's weeding your garden or making breakfast or helping your elderly grandmother bathe — work that you have to do over and over again, work that seems to erase itself. It is *essential* work that our economy tends not to acknowledge or compensate. This disregard for reproductive labor, Federici writes, is unjust and unsustainable.

These ideas weren't exactly obscure before the pandemic. But mainstream feminism — not to mention mainstream economics or politics — has mostly ignored domestic labor. Instead, it has measured women's empowerment by their presence and influence in the workplace, which is attained by outsourcing housework and child care to less economically advantaged women for a low wage. Even so, women remain mired in housework. It's common now to hear the term "the second shift" (coined in 1989

by the sociologist Arlie Hochschild), which describes how the work of maintaining a home and caring for children still falls disproportionately to women, even if they have full-time jobs and pay for help. What's more, people who are paid to do domestic labor or care work (like elder care or house cleaning) are, as a group, badly compensated and denied workplace protections or benefits. These jobs are held mostly by women of color and immigrants. The arrangement is hardly a success for women at large.

Public-policy experts and economists have pointed out in the last several years, the folly of excluding domestic work from economic measures like G.D.P., given the data showing that unpaid women's work constitutes a huge slice of economic activity in every country. A year ago, Oxfam circulated research indicating that if American women made minimum wage for the work they did around the house and caring for relatives, they'd have earned \$1.5 trillion in 2019. Globally, the value of that unpaid labor would have been almost \$11 trillion. In a 2019 speech, Marilyn Waring, a public-policy scholar and longtime advocate of revising economic measures of "productivity," noted the absurdity of defining activities like caring for elderly relatives or newborns, shopping and cooking, as having no value, or as leisure. "You cannot

make good policy if the single largest sector of your nation's economy is not visible," she said. "You can't presume to know where the needs are."

This isn't the only part of the present economic system that seems awry. The wealth gap is as wide as it has been in hundred years, with more workers than ever in unstable or low-wage employment, or subject to the whims of the "gig economy." As the exhaustion and insecurity caused by these economic conditions have deepened, more and more people are coming around to the idea that the morass of America's social ills might be traceable to an incorrect relationship to work and the question of whose work is valuable.

When the lockdowns started, this growing malaise exploded into a crisis. First came the discussion of "essential workers," a category that, it was quickly noted, frequently corresponded with the most critically underpaid workers. Then came the acute realization among the middle and upper classes that their lives had run smoothly because they'd been able to subcontract domestic labor — and, critically, elder care and child care — to other people. After nearly a year of school closures, working parents are keenly aware of the amount of child care they rely on underpaid teachers to provide for eight hours a day. Without even the ad hoc systems for managing the constant work of child care (day care; grandparents; after-school programs; summer camp; babysitters), American parents have discovered that the requirements of caring for a family match or even exceed the requirements of the full-time jobs needed to support that family.

Wages for Housework demonstrators marching in 1977.



None of this is news to, say, the single parents who were already working multiple jobs at minimum wage and unable to afford rent and food, much less babysitters — but the reversion of the professional classes to a situation that feels to them similarly untenable has inspired a radical mood. Increasingly, even those relatively unscathed by the pandemic are voicing anti-capitalist sentiment, critiquing an economy that underpays or ignores domestic labor. A group of wealthy female actors and executives (including Julianne Moore, Charlize Theron and the leaders of Birchbox, ClassPass and Rent the Runway) are calling for a “Marshall Plan for Moms,” including monthly government payments to mothers. “You know this well: Moms are the bedrock of society,” they write, “and we’re tired of working for free.” Shonda Rhimes wrote on Twitter last March: “Been home-schooling a 6-year-old and 8-year-old for one hour and 11 minutes. Teachers deserve to make a billion dollars a year. Or a week.”

Last March, the scholar and activist Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor wrote prophetically in *The New Yorker*, “American life has been suddenly and dramatically upended, and when things are turned upside down, the bottom is brought to the surface, and exposed to the light.” It has been a year of ugly revelations that a majority of Americans — the millions who were laid off, or furloughed, or were fortunate enough to be deemed “nonessential” — have experienced in isolation at home. Home, where dishes are piling up, where the cleaning and laundry loads have increased in the name of caution. Home, which has always been someone’s workplace but is now, for more people than ever before, a collision zone for many kinds of work. Home, which up to 34 million Americans have lost or are at risk of losing entirely because of job loss and subsequent eviction.

How might this year have looked different had the work we do to care for one another, ourselves and the world around us been valued at a premium? How would the future

look different if, as Federici suggests, “we refuse to base our life and our reproduction on the suffering of others,” if “we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them”?

Federici’s profile has risen since Occupy Wall Street, a movement that she supported and wrote about and that brought a new generation of leftist feminists into contact with her writing. In the last year, she has been cited over and over in popular publications — from *The New Yorker* to *The Atlantic* to *The Cut* to *Teen Vogue*, in an article titled “Socialist Feminism: What Is It and How Can It Replace Corporate ‘Girl Boss’ Feminism?”

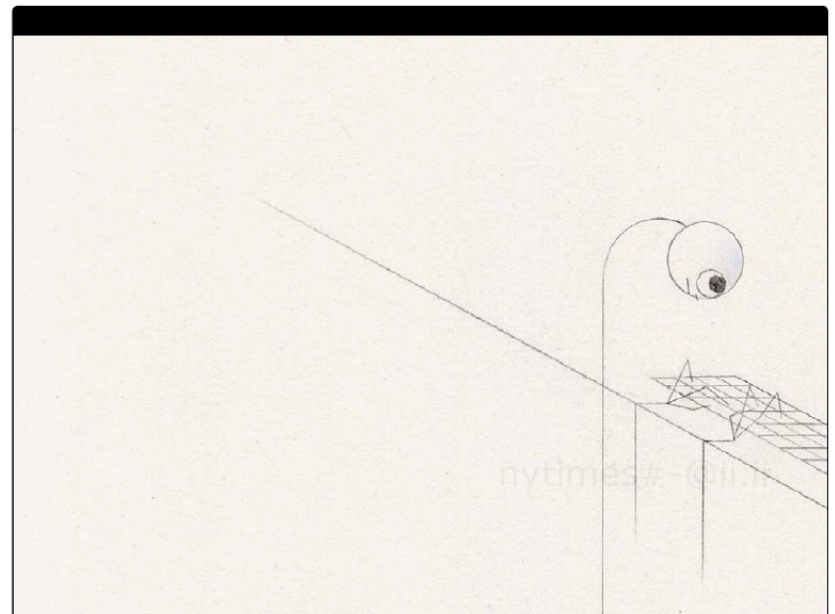
When we met in May, Federici seemed less panicked, or maybe less caught off guard, than most everyone else I knew. She was focused and brisk as she walked toward me through the park, smiling behind her mask. She is slight and wiry, with lively hands and short, curly gray hair. As we walked, she spoke quickly, tallying up the fracturing systems, the interlocking forms of vulnerability that were always present but were now affecting even the people who thought they were immune.

She said she was occasionally surprised that people are calling her up now to talk about things she wrote 20 or 30 years ago. But she long suspected that the dangers of devaluing care work would eventually materialize into a crisis too big to ignore. “The pre-existing condition is a system that makes life intolerable and unhealthy for millions of people,” she said, her words muffled slightly by her scarf. “It is a system that is not working — that is the main pre-existing condition.”

FEDERICI

was born “under the bombs.” The second daughter of a philosophy professor in Parma, Italy, she was, her mother told her later, an unintended wartime child. “I was born in Parma in 1942, one of the worst years in human history, I think,” she told me. “January was the beginning of the Final Solution.” Her mother would go to sleep in her clothes and wake to a red sky in the middle of

2.21.21 The New York Times Magazine



WFH

BY SARA HAGALE

the night, grab newborn Federici and her 4-year-old sister, and “run run run” to the outskirts of Parma, into the fields, where she would squat in the dirt with the children until the dawn came. Laughing, she told me this experience made her want never to have children: the horror of cowering in the fields with babies, the bottles of milk, the terrible vulnerability of the world.

Parma, unlike many parts of Italy after World War II, was a Communist stronghold, and in her teenage years Federici was influenced by the labor and anti-fascist movements there. Theories of oppression and workers’ rights were dinnertime conversation. Throughout her childhood, her parents and their friends discussed what the war “meant,” and what fascism had wrought.

Parma’s leftist politics coexisted uneasily with its intense patriarchal culture: Federici’s father, a professor of philosophy, was “the one who knew.” Her mother, who came from a peasant family, “was supposed not to have knowledge.” She did the cooking, the cleaning, the shopping and the caring for children and handmade everything they couldn’t afford to buy. “Nobody sees my work,” Federici’s mother would complain. Her father would tease, “That is because this work is not real work.”

Well into her 30s, Federici refused to have anything to do with what she was raised to think of as “women’s work,” everything her mother had done. (Later, as a graduate student studying phenomenology in Buffalo,

she ate uncooked hot dogs right out of the package and potatoes that she — grudgingly — boiled.) “I think I sensed the devaluation of her work. It was an activity that had no rewards, no pleasure in it.”

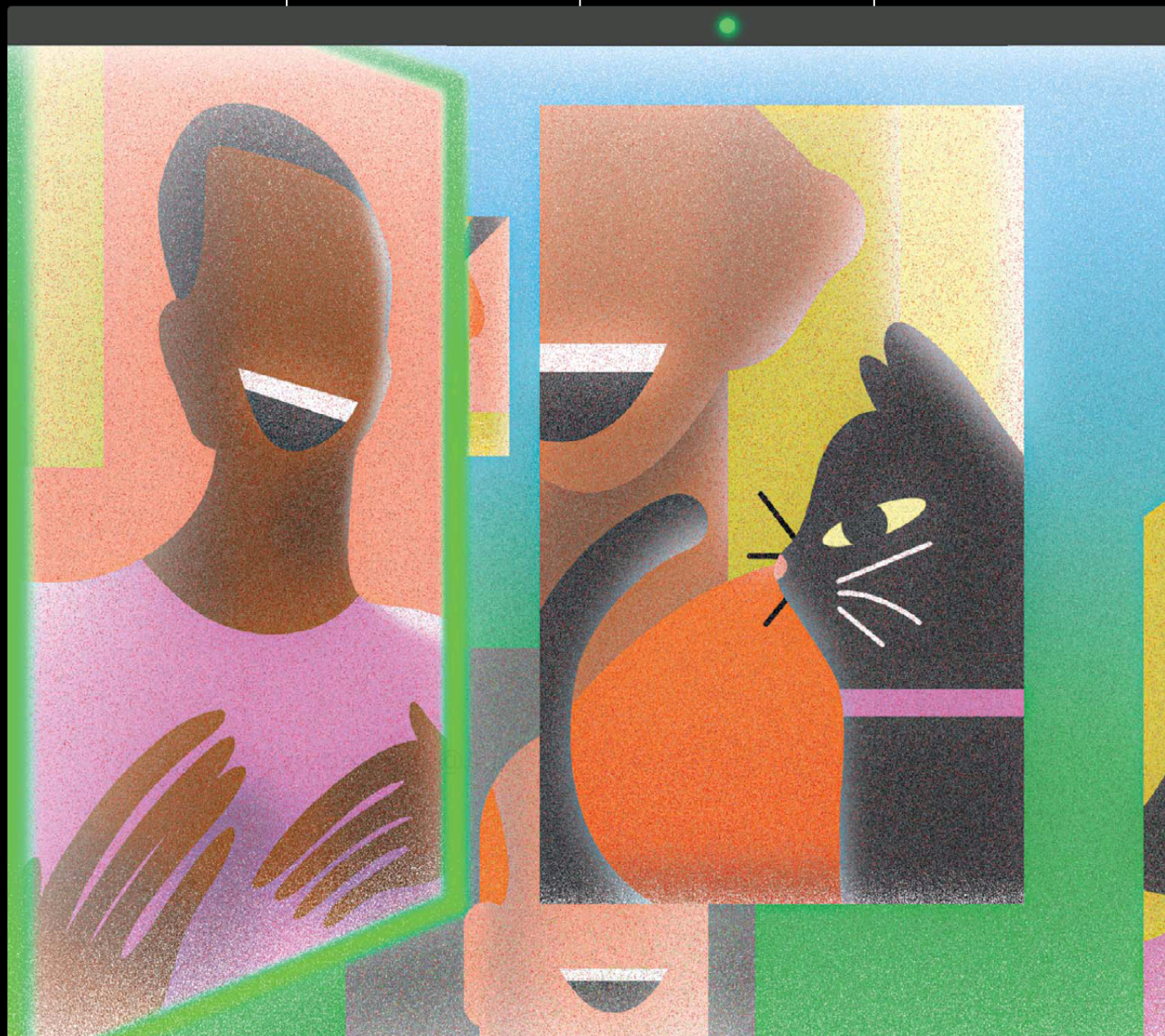
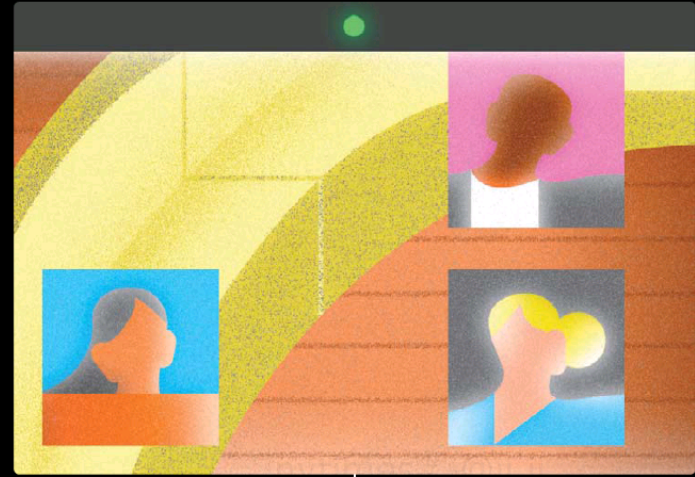
But Federici credits her mother for first exposing to the ideas that would become her life’s work. “I would, you know, hear and speak about the factory worker,” Federici told me. “The working class for me was the factory worker. And my mother several times said to me, *You’re always talking about the factory worker as if they’re the only people who work!*” She banged the park bench we were sitting on with one fist. “She said that, not my father, who was the teacher, the intellectual, the knowledgeable person. She was the one who told me the things that later became my politics. Whether in terms of housework, whether in terms of agricultural work, she was the one who basically was saying, *But work is more than blue overalls!*”

Federici’s politics didn’t fully coalesce until about 10 years later, in 1967, when she moved to the United States to study on a Fulbright scholarship. She was inspired by the vibrant antiwar and student movements in Buffalo and by the civil rights movement. But she didn’t quite see feminism as central to her political views until in 1972, when a friend passed her a tract in Italian by the feminist Mariarosa Dalla Costa: “*Donne e sovversione sociale*,” or “Women and the Subversion of the (Continued on Page 56)

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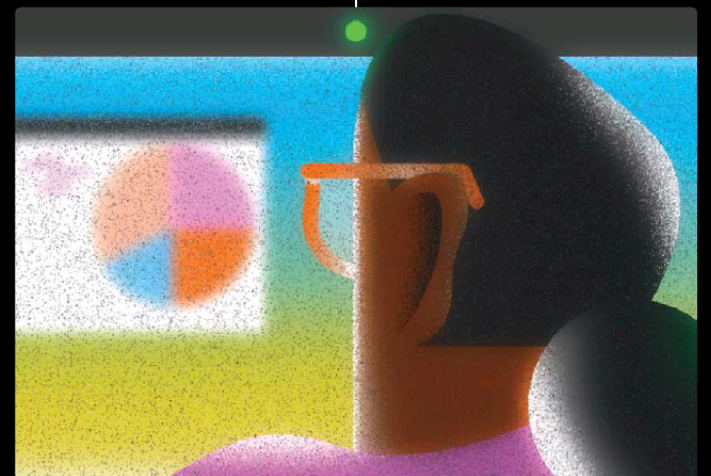
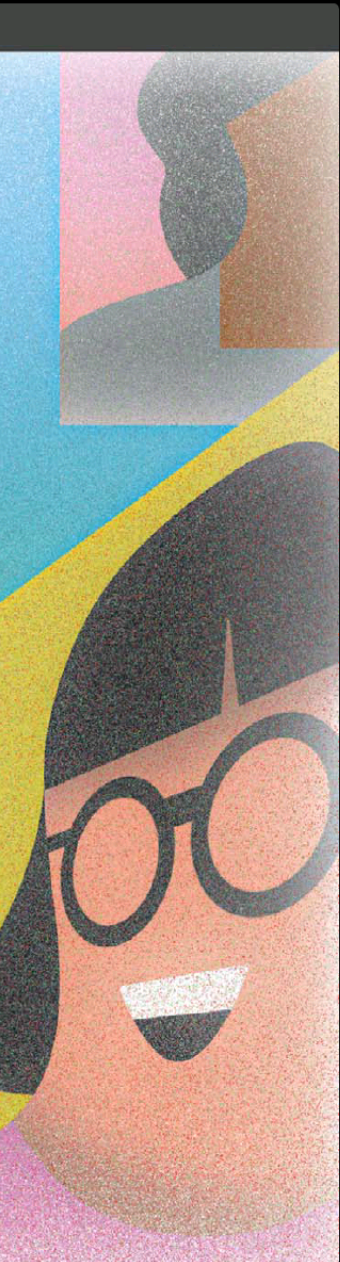
The Future
Of Work

ILLUSTRATIONS
BY
DEREK ABELLA

A
NEW CROP
OF START-UPS
WANTS TO
MAKE VIRTUAL
GATHERINGS
MORE CREATIVE —
AND EVEN
A LITTLE FUN.

ALL
TOMORROW'S
MEETINGS

BY
YIREN LU



A

few weekends ago, I went to a birthday party for a buddy of mine. The theme was “Lord of the Rings.” When I arrived, I could see that many of my friends were already there, bunched up in groups of five or six, as the host circulated among them. I said hi to the birthday boy, ran into acquaintances I hadn’t seen in a while and avoided others I didn’t want to talk to. No one wore masks.

That’s because the party was held on Gather.town, a new platform for online meetings. Instead of a fixed grid of floating heads, as you get in Zoom calls, there was a virtual map — a grassy hill, the Shire — and participants moved around it by hitting their arrow keys. Just as they do at real-life gatherings, people came together in clusters and broke apart. The farther you walked away from them, the softer their voices got.

The host mentioned in the invite that the guest list was longer than it would have been ordinarily, because the event was virtual and could accommodate everyone. In the past, friends who didn’t live in town often complained about feeling left out; now they didn’t have to be. They came from across the country, from every manner of desktop setup and living arrangement — some attended from their parents’ homes, a few had their babies in the background. The convenience was undeniable. Rather than having to dress up, call an Uber and trek over to a friend’s place on a cold winter night, I simply signed on to my computer and said hello. And because I hadn’t invested a lot of time and effort getting ready for and traveling to the party, there was no regret when I took off early.

Gather.town is one of several virtual-meeting start-ups that have emerged as a result of the pandemic, spurred by consumer demand from those stuck at home and fueled by venture capitalists eager to capture a slice of the videoconferencing market currently dominated by the likes of Zoom and Google Meet. Some, including Gather.town and

competitors like Kumospace and Pluto, are incorporating spatial dynamics — users move around and interact with one another on virtual maps — and are primarily used for office happy hours or hanging out with friends. Others, like Hopin and Run the World, whose origins pre-date the pandemic, are focusing on corporate and academic conferences.

The advent of remote work and virtual meetings has meant a decoupling of the social aspects of work and the actual doing of work at work. Instead of goofing off for a while after lunch with your co-workers, you go right back to work and goof off at night with family members or your significant other. This sounds great for employers, in theory. But Avichal Garg, an investor at Electric Capital, a venture-capital firm, argues that remote work currently trades serendipity for efficiency — and that happy accidents are crucial for innovation. “Creative problem solving requires looking at problems differently,” he says, “and having serendipitous interactions with other people allows you to see problems and discover solutions in new ways.”

How to enable people to meet online in a way that promotes connection and creativity, then, is the challenge that all these virtual-meeting start-ups face. It’s a significant one. Unlike TikTok or YouTube, which I can consume in a vegetative state on my couch, virtual meetings aren’t something I can just mindlessly scroll through at my leisure. They are inherently synchronous. Their success depends on my active participation. And while science-fiction visions like “Ready Player One” have given us a glimpse of what is possible once electronic devices are connected to our bodies and brains deeply enough to provide truly immersive experiences, that physiologically indistinguishable merger of our real and digital lives has yet to arrive. Until then, what kinds of engaging virtual-meeting experiences can we create — and which ones do we want to?

WHEN

the pandemic first hit, nearly a year ago, it was thrilling to realize that remote work was feasible. Many executives, even at tech companies, had never fully believed that geographically dispersed teams could function productively. But months at home proved that — for most knowledge workers, at least — remote work could *work*: Employees were still creating ads, writing code, contributing to a company’s bottom line. It also became clear, however, that virtual communication software like Zoom and Slack were replacing only a sliver of what the in-person work experience had been like.

In the pre-pandemic office, for example, you would run into co-workers and strike up impromptu conversations throughout the day — about your pets, your boss, whatever project you were in the middle of. Information would be disseminated, ideas exchanged, additional meetings scheduled. But on Zoom, moving from one meeting to another means choosing which buttons to click. There’s no buffer for serendipity and fewer opportunities for bonding. The sales rep who dropped by to meet with a client before the pandemic got to walk through the office and say hi to everyone. The next time the client needed to buy new customer-relations-management software, she might not recall which product had the most security features, but she would remember that one charming sales rep who went to her alma mater. Now those in sales have to demo a product over Zoom. Because they have to share their screens, they can’t take full advantage of their charisma or poise. The best they can do to cultivate a relationship, post-sales pitch, is send a follow-up email. Maybe a meme.

Before the pandemic, if you were a senior engineer or an academic, you could count on attending a few conferences a year with others in your field. You’d walk around the various company booths, pick up some logoed giveaways, get a quick summary of the latest technology or paper over dinner and tack on a few vacation days at the end. A pandemic conference, in contrast, is a series of 300-person Zoom calls in which only one person can ever speak at a time.

It’s a testament to the fecundity of Silicon Valley that so many start-ups dedicated to countering such work-from-home limitations have mushroomed in the last year. Hopin, which was founded in 2019, gained traction as thousands of academic and corporate conferences moved online; clients have included the United Nations and TechCrunch Disrupt. Compared with Zoom or Gather.town, Hopin requires more preparation and setup: Clients have to design their virtual venue by deciding on everything from color schemes and logos to sponsors and schedules. “The example I like to give is, you’re renting out a big building for an event,” says Johnny Boufarhat, Hopin’s founder and chief executive. “The office floor probably has a meeting room, which are the videoconferencing platforms,” like Zoom. “But then downstairs, on the ground floor of the building, there’s usually a big venue, and the venue can turn into whatever you want — maybe you’re hosting a recruitment night; maybe we’ll see a conference; maybe you’re hosting a meet-up.”

Each event starts at a Hopin profile page. The “enter” button takes you to the virtual-conference home page. On the right side, there’s a running group chat. On the left, there’s the banner for the conference and a list of all the live speaker sessions. Clicking on one of them takes you into a Zoom-like room. Within that room, the audience can vote on questions to put to the speaker. You can also search through a comprehensive list of the conference attendees and invite any of them into an individual video chat.

While Hopin’s focus is on efficiency, there are other start-ups that more actively seek to recreate the chance encounters of the workplace. The virtual offices created by Teamflow and Branch come with personal desks, common areas and private conference rooms. On Teamflow, your video appears as a bubble on a virtual office plan, which you can move around the office by typing on your keyboard. When you want to check on co-workers, you just “walk” up to them. When you are going to your next meeting, you might “bump” into someone.

Much of the inspiration animating this bloom of spatial meeting platforms comes from video games.

Yang Mou, the chief executive of Kumospace, was a competitive StarCraft player in college and, once lockdowns started happening, wondered why it was that he could spend hours and hours playing online with his friends and not want to stop, while Zoom meetings engendered only fatigue. In creating Kumospace, he was particularly influenced by massively multiplayer online role-playing games like World of Warcraft. “One of the jokes is that it’s a glorified chat room,” he says. “You play the game, you run out of stuff to do and then you’re really just hanging out with friends.” He adds, “It’s like going to the mall.”

Events hosted in Kumospace are set in a virtual living room. Once inside, you can interact directly with your surroundings, as you might in a video game. When you sit down at the piano, it plays Debussy; when you grab a drink at the virtual bar, it drains over time as you “drink” it.

One of Kumospace’s insights is that video games give participants a goal around which to center their social energy. In the physical world, this structural element is often implicitly present as some sort of physical interaction, like dancing or sharing a meal. In the digital world, there are fewer options for analogues, mostly things that are easily rendered in pixels, like board games, poker and video streams. But pandemic hits like Teleparty, which enables synchronized movie watching among groups of friends, and Among Us, a multiplayer game of deception, attest to the fact that virtual activities can generate real camaraderie. Kumospace plans to offer users a number of games built into the virtual surroundings. One that’s already running is popular for friendly hangouts as well as team-bonding events. “We actually have an escape-room game,” Mou says. “It’s a series of 10 different rooms on Kumospace, and there’s a puzzle in each one, and you work with your team to solve each one before you can proceed to the next.”

As employees move out of big cities, often permanently, and companies extend their work-from-home options, investors are betting that

these virtual-meeting start-ups will outlast the pandemic. This seems like a reasonable expectation. A year of remote work has fundamentally shifted — or expanded — the kinds of decisions we’re willing to make without relying on in-person interaction, from fund-raising to sales to voting to making friends. “People will likely have a mixture of traditional real-world offices and spaces as well as virtual spaces,” says Elad Gil, an entrepreneur and angel investor whose most recent project, Pluto, is a virtual-meeting platform that allows users to move around 3-D renderings of places like the Maldives, Admont Abbey in Austria and Burning Man. Even most conferences, those original super-spreader events, are likely to keep at least some remote facets, if for no other reason than doing so will be profitable: “You’re able to attract significantly more people to the event,” Boufarhat says. “It’s a lot more accessible.”

START-UPS

like Kumospace and Hopin recognize that while in-person interactions can’t be fully replicated, they can in many respects be surpassed, or productively disrupted. Virtual meetings make the exchange of contact information and the ability to remember names trivially easy. They also make it possible to collect a great deal more data. Software tools like Otter.ai and Huddl.ai, which transcribe and, with machine learning, analyze recordings of meetings, can improve transparency, detect fraud and improve internal record keeping. (They also pose privacy challenges.)

Virtual meetings can subvert traditional social dynamics in positive ways too: One thing users like most about Hopin, for instance, is a feature that pairs off participants for speed-networking “dates”; because the platform forces the engagement, it removes the social anxiety usually involved in figuring out whom to talk to at a cocktail party. Virtual meetings also de-emphasize criteria like looks, height and geography. Everyone is only a blurry rectangle — whether located down the block or in San Francisco or in Dubai

— and there’s little reason physical appearances can’t be further abstracted with filters, deep fakes or simple avatars.

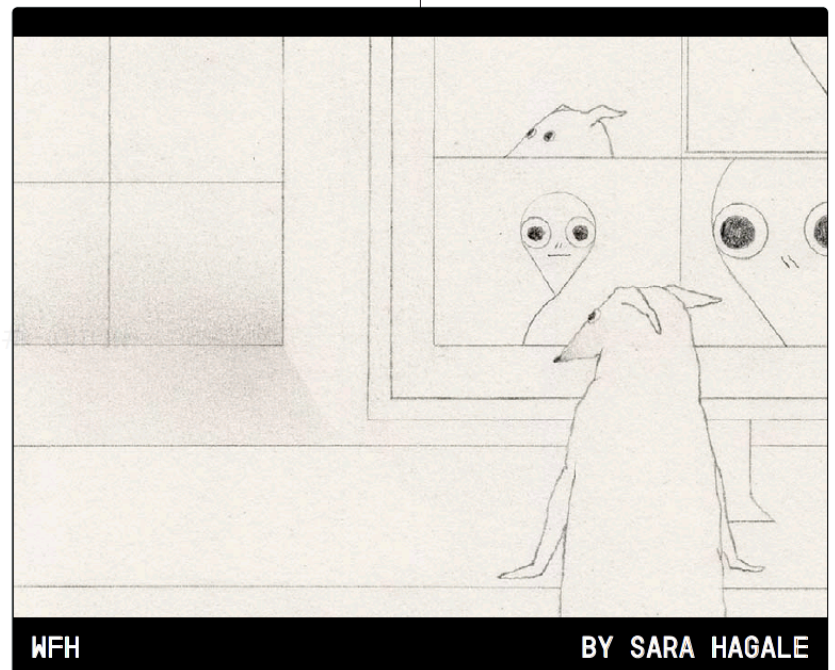
Capabilities like these point to a future of meetings that is increasingly data-driven, efficient, unbiased, inclusive and accessible — but also possibly soulless. Whether this shift toward a more anodyne, algorithmic ethos is a good thing, of course, depends on your vantage point. Matt Levine, who writes a Bloomberg newsletter called Money Stuff, recently riffed on the fact that company whistle-blower reports have increased by 30 percent in the work-from-home era. He concluded that when people work together in person, a conviviality develops that makes ratting colleagues out feel like an act of betrayal; this inhibition disappeared once co-workers saw one another only on screens. “I guess this story is good news from a prevention-of-financial-crime perspective,” Levine wrote. “But it is sort of a sad story from a human perspective. All these people feeling disconnected from their work and their colleagues, with no strong personal ties of loyalty and friendship and common mission. Sure, the common mission in these particular cases was crime, but still.”

It’s possible that some of this dislocation that Levine is talking about will slowly dissipate as technology evolves — hardware in particular. For all the advances in software and platforms over the past year, most remote workers are still largely limited by their laptop cameras and

audio inputs, which are not usually state-of-the-art. Audio lags. Video is overexposed. It’s hard to suspend disbelief and feel as though you’re in the same room as someone who looks like a shadow half the time and sounds like a gremlin.

Virtual reality, which might have been expected to get one of the biggest boosts from the move to work-from-home, has actually been the focus of few new start-ups so far — most consumers simply don’t have the hardware to enable V.R. But that is likely to change. Right now we can reach only two senses — sight and sound — through the computer, but eventually we will be able to, if not actually get to the other three, produce proxies that are convincing enough. Having a drink with someone virtually could be as intoxicating as in the physical world.

By then, humans will have most likely progressed as well. The societal conditioning that currently tells us that meeting in person is superior, somehow more “real” than meeting online, is already fading. Boufarhat points out that the Hopin team has always been remote, and yet when he does meet employees in person for the first time, “I feel like I already know them.” The intensity of being in a fast-growing start-up together, whether virtually or physically, has a way of strengthening bonds. “Humans are extremely adaptable, and people have adapted to a cloud-first world,” says Garg, the investor. “In person is just a different way to get to the same end place of deep emotional connection.” ♦



WFH

BY SARA HAGALE

WORKERS
ON
THE EDGE

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THEIR JOBS
ARE ESSENTIAL .
BUT THEIR
FUTURE IN
A POST-COVID
ECONOMY IS
FAR FROM CLEAR .

PHOTOGRAPHS
BY SABIHA CIMEN

Last spring, when Covid-19 abruptly forced employers to shut down offices and kept half of American workers at home, The Times Magazine gathered the stories of essential workers who were still doing their jobs in person. A flight attendant's hands were raw from washing. A cleaning supervisor, struggling to find personal protective equipment, developed a habit of changing her clothes before touching her daughters when she returned home. A food deliveryman, never fazed by dangerous New York traffic, found himself praying to God to keep him safe from the virus. The threat then, while terrifying, was also straightforward: Would the pandemic come for them next?

Almost a year later, workers' apprehension about Covid-19 has taken on a more existential dimension. It's not that the danger of infection has receded but that a more nebulous set of threats, having to do with their livelihoods, has joined it. For waiters and cashiers, there's the never-ending question of whether their restaurants and shops will be mandated to shut down or reduce service. Flight attendants and hotel housekeepers, many of them furloughed, avoid making long-term plans on the chance they'll be called back. Now vaccines are offering hope that the pandemic will end, but as one business after another closes for good, there's an emerging question of how long many

Americans' occupations will exist, in any recognizable form, at all.

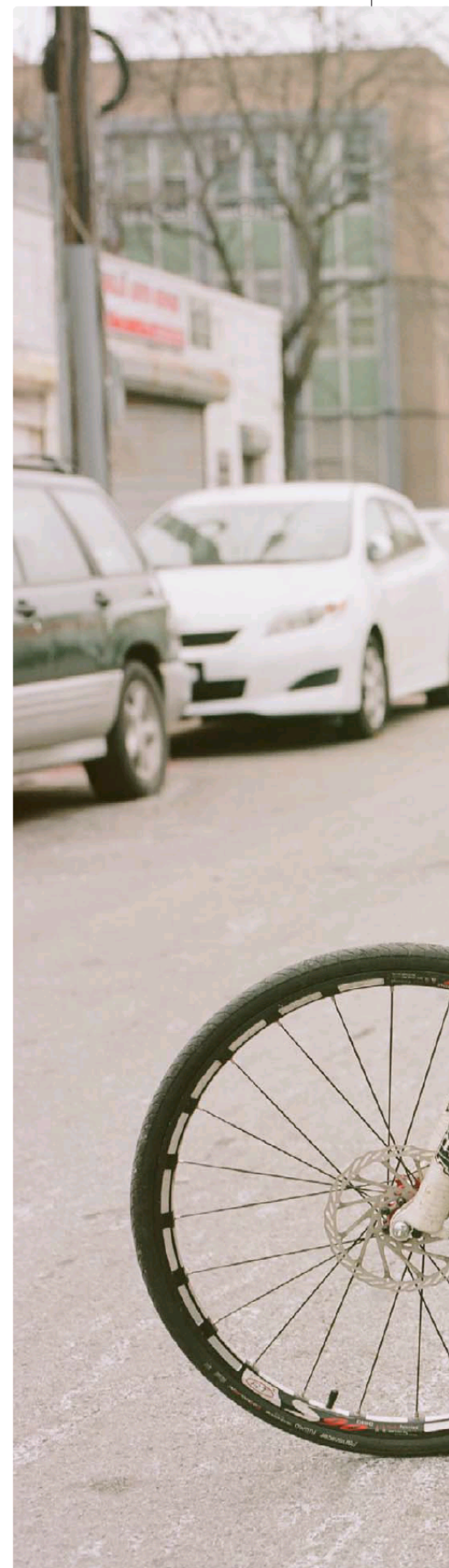
The pandemic has catalyzed a shift that economists had long predicted: Having discovered how convenient the internet can be — ordering groceries to doorsteps, Zooming into conferences, visiting the doctor onscreen, watching new movie releases on TV — a lot of people don't want to return to the old way, including the practice of commuting to an office every morning. That may be fine with many employers, if productivity losses from telework turn out to be more than offset by the cost savings.

For those who sell insurance or develop software, the biggest change to their lives may be a permanent shift to remote arrangements. But fewer people commuting and traveling to conferences means less need for the millions of service workers — burrito fillers, corner-store clerks, airplane cleaners — for whom office workers have been such reliable customers. "It's as if this pandemic were uniquely designed to make work harder for low-wage people and not much harder for high-wage people," David Autor, an economist at M.I.T., says.

Much about Americans' post-pandemic spending habits — and, in turn, the post-pandemic lives of workers — remains uncertain: Will people line up at movie theaters and fill fast-food restaurants again? Put their savings toward vacations instead of home remodeling? In this issue, we spoke again with seven of the subjects we featured in April, to learn what they've lived through since then and what's ahead for their occupations, and the photographer Sabiha Cimen traveled around the United States to photograph them. The result is a portrait of how, more than a year after Covid-19 reached American shores, it's clear that the pandemic's influence on our working lives will be lasting and profound.
— Vauhini Vara

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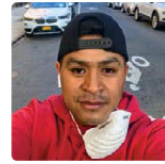
FOOD-DELIVERY
WORKER



In recent months, Edvin Quic has experienced a novel form of nostalgia: longing for the early weeks of the Covid-19 outbreak. Quic, who works for an app-based delivery service, recalls bicycling through an eerily empty cityscape, hauling pizza and

pad thai to quarantining residents while trying to evade a virus that was invisible but, seemingly, omnipresent. Yet for Quic, business was up: He was earning twice as much as he did before Covid-19, making up to seven deliveries per hour. And the

■ A LOOK BACK:



' I MUST TALK TO A HUNDRED PEOPLE A DAY. IT'S DANGEROUS. '

usually anarchic New York streets were free of the steamrolling traffic that imperils cyclists.

Quic is now down to, at most, six daily deliveries, taking home about \$60 to \$80 each working day. Like many gig-economy laborers, he struggles with a work schedule that is subject to the impersonal — often, inscrutable — movements of algorithms. “Sometimes, you get up in the morning, you open the app and there’s nothing for you,” Quic said. “No jobs.”

The food-delivery industry is booming, labor advocates assert, at the expense of its workers. The pandemic has brought surging revenue to apps like DoorDash and Grubhub. In New York, tens of thousands of the newly unemployed have joined the ranks of delivery workers — in particular, refugees from the restaurant business. A result is a steep decline in the earnings of individual delivery cyclists, who already endure harsh conditions. As independent contractors, delivery-app workers are not entitled to a minimum wage or other benefits. They face danger from motorists, bad weather and exposure to Covid-19, but if they are injured or fall ill, they receive no compensation.

For the delivery-app industry, 2021 may bring challenges. Analysts caution that Americans might revert to old dining habits after the pandemic. In February, the House reintroduced the PRO Act, an employee-protection bill that would reclassify many contractors as employees.

Reform would be welcomed by New York delivery cyclists, who have held protests demanding better treatment. As for Quic, he’s planning a career change. He has scraped together savings and is partnering with a friend to open Chicken Stop, a takeout restaurant in Brooklyn. Quic reckons the restaurant business can’t be worse than his current job. “Doing deliveries,” he said, “there’s no future in that.” — *Jody Rosen*

■ NAME:
Edvin Quic

■ AGE:
32

■ LOCATION:
New York City



FLIGHT ATTENDANT

When the pandemic hit, Chelsey kept flying as long as she could. She refused to give in to anxiety, even as a single parent with a 4-year-old daughter waiting at home. (She shares custody with her ex-husband.) She turned down voluntary buyouts and opportunities to reduce her hours. Flying was a passion: Her mother was a flight attendant and used to take her on free trips when planes weren't full. In her own career, Chelsey regularly spent more than 90 hours a month in the air, relishing adventures to new countries.

But last October, Chelsey was involuntarily furloughed by her airline. (Chelsey requested to be identified by her first name only because she is not an official spokeswoman for the airline.) About three months later, when the federal government extended the Payroll Support Program, requiring the airline to pay flight attendants their salaries in exchange for receiving federal help, Chelsey got her job back — kind of. She began receiving about \$1,400 a month in take-home pay, her base rate, roughly half of what she usually makes. Her mortgage alone is \$1,525. Desperate for a backup plan, she started pursuing a real-estate license.

Chelsey, like many other flight attendants, is waiting to go through in-person retraining, an annual requirement, before she can fly again. The federal emergency funding, meanwhile, requires airlines to keep employees on payroll only until March 31. So come April 1, she might be out of a job once more.

Senior flight attendants say you haven't really been a flight attendant until you've experienced two furloughs. Chelsey may have several ahead. Flights are only about 40 percent full, compared with about 80 percent in pre-pandemic days. The industry's future depends in large part on when people feel

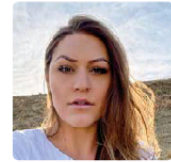
- NAME :
Chelsey
- AGE :
30
- LOCATION :
Colorado Springs

comfortable returning to the air. When it comes to leisure travel, domestic trips might rebound in a couple of years, with international ones taking longer. But some analysts say business travel, which makes up a substantial portion of airlines' revenue from first- and business-class seats and last-minute tickets, may take a decade to return to pre-pandemic levels or never fully recover, as organizations rethink in-person meetings.

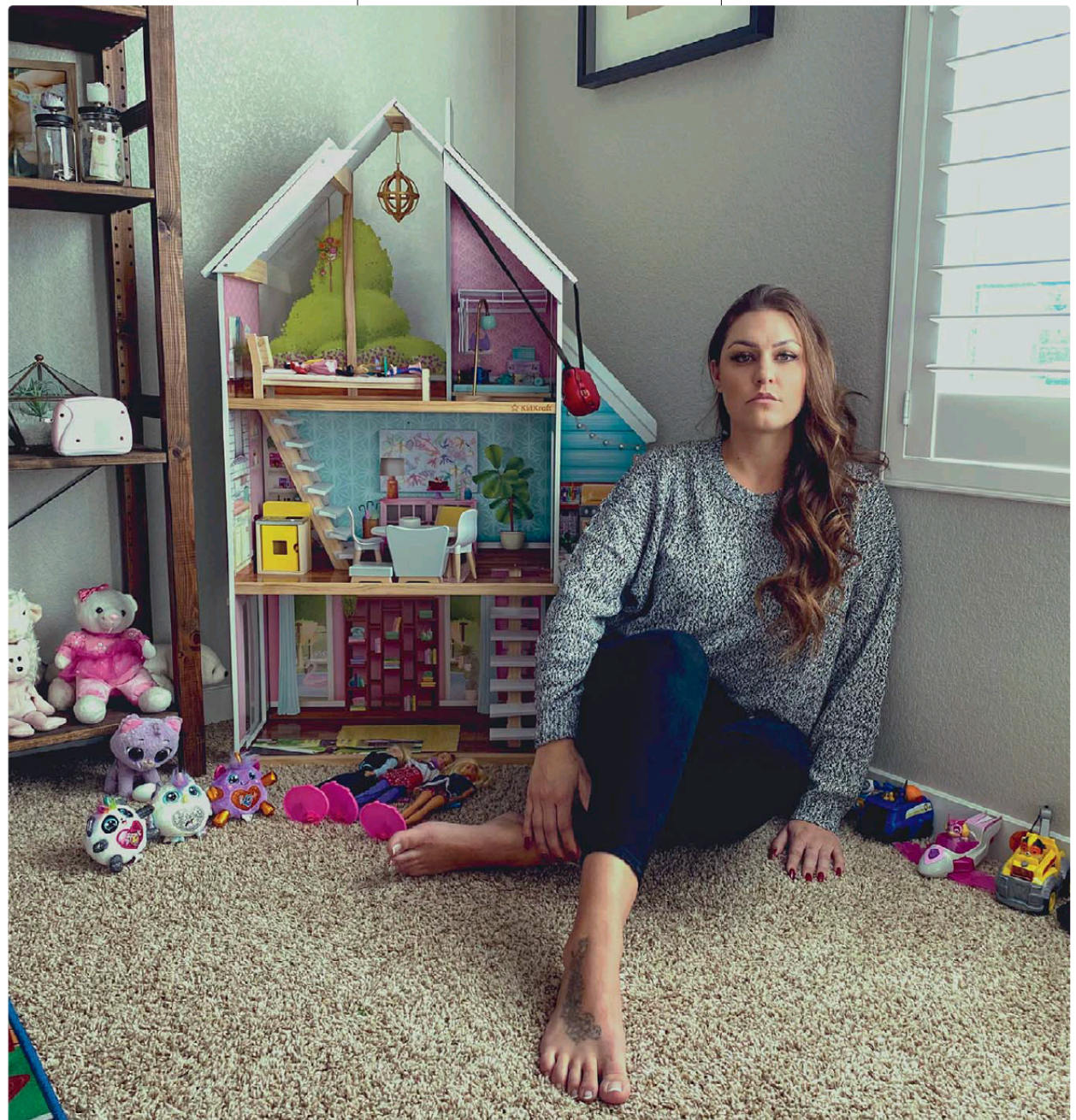
While Chelsey waits, she is weeks away from getting her real-estate license. Still, if she receives a call scheduling her to fly, she will race to the airport. "It's like a toxic relationship," she said. "Flight attendants love their job. They can jerk us around, and we'll come back."

— Maggie Jones

■ A LOOK BACK :



'IT'S AN INTIMATE SPACE. A METAL TUBE WITH PEOPLE COUGHING, SNEEZING, PICKING THEIR NOSES, EVERY DAY.'





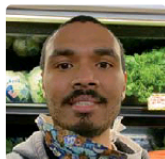
At the beginning of the pandemic, Donell Johnson Jr.'s biggest problem was how to stock his tiny West Oakland grocery co-op for the panic buying that had begun. A year later he looks back on those early weeks as the most difficult. Business for Mandela Grocery Cooperative, where he is a worker-owner, has remained brisk enough for him and his co-owners to reduce Covid-19 risk by limiting hours without losing income; profit has actually increased, enough for the co-op to fund new dental and health plans for employees. — @il.i

That experience stands in contrast to some larger grocery trends. While the industry has had sharp increases in profit — last summer the large grocery chains Kroger and Albertsons reported quarterly profit increases of 90 percent and 150 percent, respectively, from a year earlier, according to a Brookings Institution paper — many employees of larger chains have not seen that reflected in the form of pay increases or hazard pay, even as work has gotten busier and more dangerous. “There is a heavy investment in tech and automation,” says Molly Kinder, a research associate at Brookings and an author of the paper, “and the workers are by and large left behind.”

Proprietors of small, independent stores such as Mandela Grocery are hoping to bring in customers who want their money to benefit their communities rather than large corporations that are increasingly seen as not supporting their workers. Mandela Grocery prides itself on serving West Oakland’s Black community and prioritizing products from Black-owned businesses.

The co-op has also started letting people order groceries online for delivery, though this hasn’t been particularly popular. Johnson suspects that’s because people like the personal interaction of shopping at a local store. Larger chains have the advantage of capital and scale, but Johnson believes that a personal touch can help Mandela stay in business. “A lot of the customers see that we care about them,” he said. “We care about their health, and we care about this community.” — Carvell Wallace

■ A LOOK BACK:



‘ WE WORKED REALLY HARD LAST WEEK, RESTOCKING THE SHELVES. WE DID RUN OUT OF STUFF. ’

- NAME :
Donell Johnson Jr.
- AGE :
36
- LOCATION:
Oakland, Calif.

Photographs by Sabiha Cimen/Magnum for The New York Times

When **Tanveer Hussain** became a pharmacist 30 years ago, he took an oath, as licensed pharmacists must do, to devote himself “to a lifetime of service to others.” It wasn’t a difficult promise to keep until last year, when Covid-19 arrived. Hussain has worked at City Drug for almost two decades, and the work has never been this challenging. He’s giving advice to more customers and managing an increase in deliveries as people avoid leaving their homes. Chronic staffing issues have also plagued the pharmacy, with some of his colleagues staying home because of Covid-19 exposure. “I love to help people,” Hussain said. “But sometimes, I really just want to walk away.”

After a year of seeing images and news reports of overworked doctors and nurses, Americans are familiar with the plight of frontline health care workers in hospitals. Less known is that, as doctors’ offices closed and some nurses and physicians relocated to Covid-19 hot spots to staff hospitals in need, the country’s community-based pharmacists stepped in. “In a lot of communities, they were the only access to health care that Americans had,” said Michael Hogue, the president of the American Pharmacists Association. Pharmacists adjusted prescriptions, immunized grade-school children and ran Covid-19 testing sites. They began delivering drugs and medical equipment and upgrading their technology to accommodate touchless transactions.

These services can be cost-prohibitive for pharmacies, especially independent ones like City Drug. Pharmacies have struggled over the past several years to stay profitable, as insurance companies’ reimbursement rates for drugs keep falling. While big companies such as CVS and Walgreens are large enough to weather this change, smaller ones are less able to.

With the U.S. vaccination rollout so far dominated by big chains, many independent pharmacists are

vying for a greater role, hoping to profit from offering vaccinations. But the freezers used to hold the most sensitive vaccines at the appropriate temperature can cost \$10,000 apiece, in addition to other expenses. Without government support, it can be hard to justify investing that much in the operation.

At the same time, the pandemic could help underscore how indispensable small pharmacies like Hussain’s are. Notably, West Virginia has vaccinated a higher percentage of residents than almost any other state by coordinating with independent pharmacies rather than joining a federal plan that partnered with Walgreens and CVS. For a long time, pharmacists have been lobbying to be considered health care providers by the federal government. This would allow people such as Hussain to be reimbursed by insurance companies for providing patient services that go beyond filling prescriptions. It would also contribute to a more sustainable business model, allowing pharmacies to rely less on prescription sales. Hogue is hopeful that the robust response to Covid-19 could finally bring this about.

Hussain, meanwhile, is just trying to get through the pandemic. Last year, his wife found out she had cancer, and when he isn’t working, he takes her to chemotherapy sessions. The additional stress hasn’t been easy, though he was buoyed in early February when he received his second dose of a Covid-19 vaccine. “It gives hope,” he said.

— *Lovia Gyarkye*



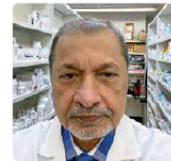
Photograph by Sabiha Cimen/Magnum for The New York Times



- NAME:
Tanveer Hussain
- AGE:
69
- LOCATION:
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

nytimes#-@ii.ii

■ A LOOK BACK:



' THE MAIN THINGS PEOPLE ASK ME ABOUT ARE MASKS, GLOVES, ALCOHOL, SANITIZERS, CLOROX AND LYSOL.'

OFFICE-CLEANING MANAGER

Last spring, when shortages of personal protective equipment (P.P.E.) made it difficult to find latex gloves and N95 masks, E. sewed three dozen cloth masks for her cleaning crews. Everyone she worked with feared infection. But they saw unemployment as an even greater danger. Indeed, when shelter-in-place orders closed businesses across the Eastern Seaboard, thousands of commercial office cleaners were laid off. About 15 percent of the office cleaners in the Washington, D.C., area represented by the Service Employees International Union, Local 32BJ — the country's largest union for property-service workers — were suddenly out of work. Most still haven't recovered their jobs. But E., who oversees the cleaning of 14 buildings in Virginia and requested anonymity for fear of losing her job, hasn't had a vacation day since last spring. "Sometimes we're still disinfecting at 4 in the morning," she said.

Many of the buildings that E. is responsible for contain medical centers, which reopened quickly. Where five people used to clean an office, E. is now told to bring only three and to have them focus on areas like door knobs, light switches and keyboards. E. is technically there only to supervise, though she sometimes pitches in. When Covid-19 cases are traced to an office, she uses extra staff and a machine that coats everything — floors, carpets, walls — with a powerful disinfectant.

Many of E.'s colleagues have had Covid-19; one of them spent two months in the hospital and nearly died. The cleaning crews E. supervises are nonunionized and largely made up of immigrants, like her, from Latin America. Though she says her current employer treats them with generosity and respect, after more than 30 years in the business,

■ NAME:
E.

■ AGE:
53

■ LOCATION:
Northern Virginia



■ A LOOK BACK:
' I'M AFRAID THAT
IF SOMETHING
HAPPENS TO ME, MY
DAUGHTERS WILL BE
LEFT ALONE. '

she knows that attitude is rare. "They look at us like we're pack animals that can do everything, that don't get sick, nothing," she told me. "It's because we have put ourselves on the block, with our desperation to earn and to keep our hard-won home. We say 'yes' to everything. We say: 'It's OK. We'll do it. We'll keep working.'"

Nationwide, the number of jobs for building cleaners and janitors fell less than 1 percent from March to December, according to a Brookings Institution analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data. Deep-cleaning is labor-intensive. But office cleaners' job prospects could worsen after the pandemic subsides. Real estate is a significant expense, and reducing that cost by permanently adopting

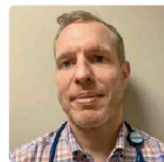
some telework habits may prove too tempting for chief executives to resist. In an essay published by the Brookings Institution's Hamilton Project, the M.I.T. scholars David Autor and Elisabeth Reynolds write that such a shift would mean "steep declines in demand for building cleaning." When professionals don't congregate in offices, there are few wastebaskets to empty.
— *Marcela Valdes*

Photographs by Sabiha Cimen/Magnum
for The New York Times

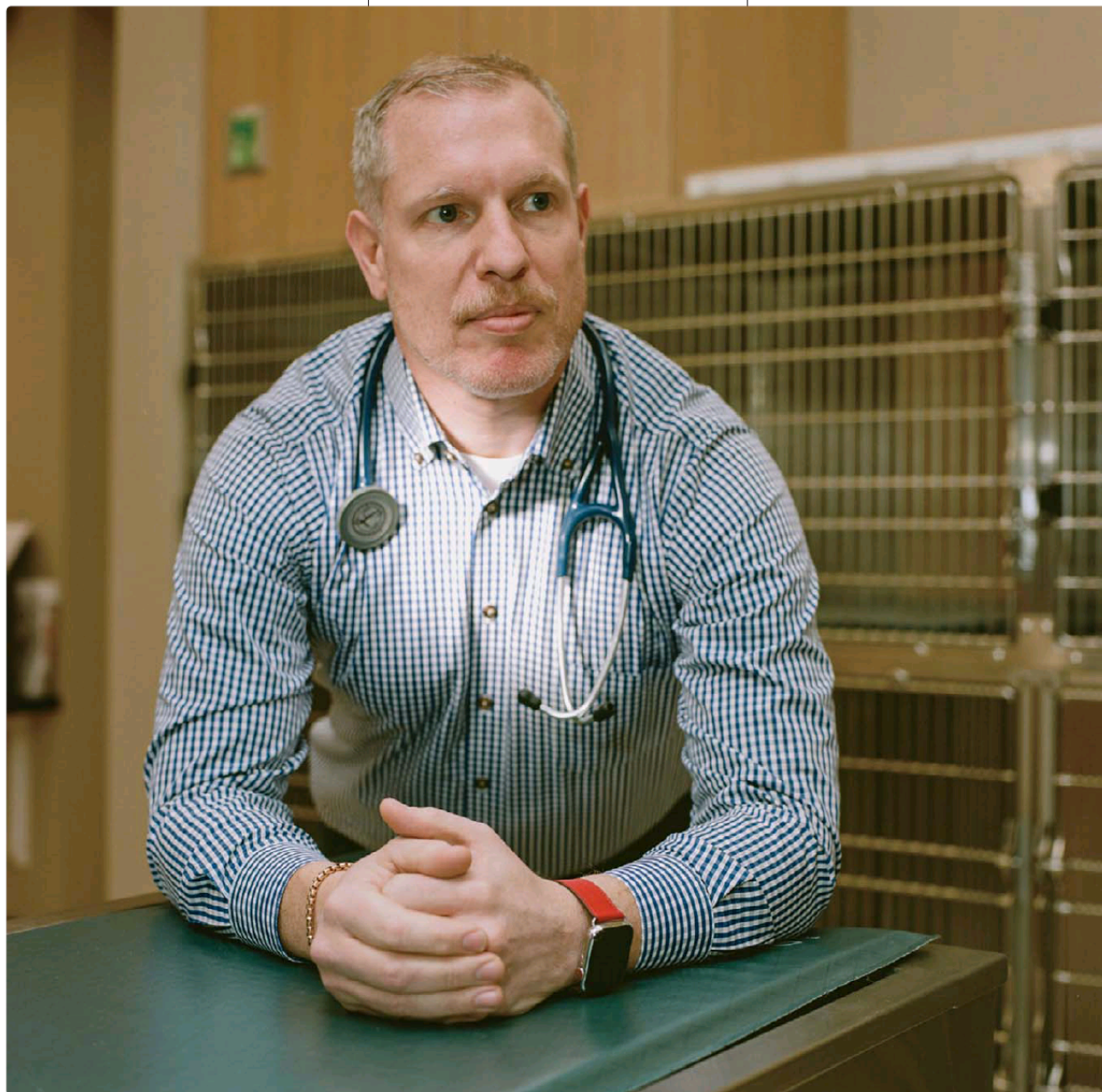
VETERINARIAN

- NAME:
Brian J. Bourquin
- AGE:
47
- LOCATION:
Boston

■ A LOOK BACK:



' CLIENTS
HAVE TO STAND
BEHIND THAT
LINE FOR SOCIAL
DISTANCING.
WE WEAR GLOVES
AND MASKS,
AND WE USE A NEW
LEASH ON DOGS,
SO WE DON'T
HAVE TO TOUCH THE
CLIENT'S LEASH.'



In April, Dr. Brian J. Bourquin had just finished rearranging his veterinary practice to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission. His two clinics in Boston had gone client-free, with only pets allowed in the building. Every dog received a new leash at the door. This pivot happened quickly, and left Bourquin only partly prepared for a boom he didn't even know was coming.

Veterinary medicine, as it turns out, belongs to the short list of storefront industries that have thrived in the pandemic. As people spend more time in their homes, they've found themselves more attuned to pets' afflictions, both real (itchy skin, behavioral concerns) and imagined ("Does Oreo's breathing seem weird to you?"). On top of that, new pet ownership has soared as people look for ways to cope with loneliness and boredom. According to VetSuccess, a data-analytics firm, nationwide clinic revenue has risen 7 percent over the past year.

Bourquin has opened a third location, but that has just barely allowed him to keep up with all the newly adopted pets. With New England's shelters having been cleared out, people are adopting more pets from the South, and Bourquin has found that many of the out-of-state patients come with new behavioral problems to treat: noise phobias, dog-park aggression. "These are rural strays who maybe have never even seen a sidewalk, let alone a skyscraper," Bourquin says. His January appointment book is usually full of openings, but on the day we spoke there was just a single availability. The wait-list for surgery is at least three months long.

Veterinarians are speculating about what might happen when people go back to work. Will the rush to adopt subside? Will owners send their pets back? "When the shelters emptied out, there was this fear of, 'Oh, no, are we going to see the pendulum swing the other way?'" says Dr. Dana Varble, the chief veterinary officer at North American Veterinary Community, an industry education group. "We're not seeing that yet. The trend seems to be that pets, at least at this point in our culture, seem to have a greater significance than just objects."

— *Jamie Lauren Keiles*

PHYSICAL
THERAPIST





■ A LOOK BACK:



' SHOULD I BE WEARING GLOVES? SHOULD I BE WEARING GOGGLES? I DON'T KNOW.'

■ NAME:
Kate Doolittle

■ AGE:
46

■ LOCATION:
Boston area

Last April, Kate Doolittle, who sees patients in their homes or in assisted-living facilities, was just getting used to wearing a mask. Most of her clients are elderly and in fragile health, and she worried more about infecting them than about being exposed herself: Early on, one died of Covid-19.

Though Doolittle received her second vaccine dose in January, that anxiety persists, because the vaccines' effect on transmission remains unclear. She is also learning to tend to a new set of clients: people recuperating from Covid-19 hospitalization. That requires her to change into and out of extra layers of protective gear, often in a client's driveway. "Sometimes I'm trying to bleach-wipe my pants," she told me, though she now knows that most people contract the virus by inhaling airborne particles. "You still don't want to be carrying something from place to place."

Before the pandemic, aging baby boomers were already expected to strain the home-care industry. Now many companies are turning away new patients because of pandemic-related staff shortages — employees in quarantine as a result of Covid-19 sickness or exposure or whose children are out of school — and the influx of Covid-19 survivors, says William A. Dombi, the president of the National Association for Home Care and Hospice, a trade group. People are also more reluctant to stay in assisted-living facilities, which were ravaged by the virus.

Even after the pandemic ends, the American Physical Therapy Association predicts heightened demand from postponed elective

surgeries (typically, many of Doolittle's clients are recovering from joint replacements, which are on hold at Boston hospitals, along with other elective surgeries), as well as a growing need for Covid-19 rehabilitation and the imperative to address conditions like heart disease that have been exacerbated by a year's worth of inactivity. The question, Dombi says, is "Can we get the availability of staff to go up?"

In addition to therapists such as Doolittle, whose salaried position at a large agency offers security, workers in the industry include roughly 3.5 million health and personal aides who provide in-home care and who are disproportionately people of color, recent immigrants and women. Many were laid off or unable to work during the pandemic and struggled to access relief, while those who stayed on contended with low wages and a lack of benefits and protective equipment.

President Biden campaigned on a proposal to spend billions to expand home-care and child-care services, including by offering tax credits for unpaid caregiving, making more in-home services eligible for Medicaid and encouraging workers to collectively bargain for increased pay and benefits. Advocates for home workers hope persistent labor shortages will increase bipartisan support for reforms. "We think the table is set for improvements in working conditions, compensation and respect," Dombi says.

Doolittle hopes that her professional life will be mostly back to normal a year from now — no more Covid-19 patients; no more masks impeding communication with clients who may be confused or hard of hearing. She's also impatient for her family and friends to get their vaccines so that she can start to have a social life again. "I feel stuck in this limbo," she said. "Even though there's a light at the end of the tunnel, we're not there yet, and we have to be super careful about everything. I still pose a threat to people."

— *Kim Tingley*



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THE
DOWN LOAD

The New York
Times Magazine

BY
JENNA WORTHAM

The Future
Of Work

P. 53

ILLUSTRATION
BY
SHUHUA XIONG

CORPORATE
WELLNESS APPS
ARE EVERYWHERE,
BUT THEY
CAN'T ADDRESS
THE REAL
PROBLEM: THE
ALIENATION
OF 21ST-CENTURY
WORK.

P

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andemic fatigue hits different. You know the feeling: You've been online all day, bouncing between video calls with colleagues and FaceTimes with family, maybe pausing for a quick vinyasa flow. Your eyeballs feel glassy, your brain parched and limbs sluggish. When your workday is finally over, you consider leaving the house but hear the voice of the comedian Elsa Majimbo — *it's a pandeemic* — in your head. Instead, you get back online, maybe to listen to a talk, binge a costume drama, play a few hours of Fortnite, look up a dinner recipe or fire up Seesaw to help your kids with their homework. This is the sum of your life now. You're essentially a husk. In sweatpants.

Shifting our entire lives indoors this past year has also meant shifting our entire lives online. For a significant part of the population, where we work, where we socialize, where we relax got squeezed into the same two-dimensional space: our screens. The distinction between work and everything else, already a blurry line for most Americans, got even blurrier. Many of us spend a vast majority of our waking hours working, rarely taking breaks for lunch, vacation or even parental leave. Before the pandemic, the workday was full of natural pauses like commuting, elevator rides, hallway chats, caffeine runs. Now many of us work for hours straight without even pausing to stand up.

We worked at more than our jobs too: 2020 required a crash course in epidemiology, civics, capitalism, white supremacy, mutual aid and abolition. The pandemic also

ignited an existential crisis for the white-collar worker class. Toiling under global capitalism often means alienation from the product of your labor or, at the very least, the means to shape or control it, and that discovery alone formed its own kind of despair.

Among white-collar workers, there was a sense of restlessness, both online (the number of daily active Twitter users jumped 24 percent) and offline, as households struggled to adapt. Employers scrambled to figure out how to offer support — which essentially meant keeping people working under circumstances in which work was basically impossible. Sick workers cost employers \$575 billion in 2019, through missing work and showing up tired, unwell and unfocused and performing at partial capacity; that amount most likely increased significantly in 2020.

Before the pandemic, corporations already offered employees spas, on-site barbers, snacks and free meals, massages and exercise stipends. In March, these offerings became more plentiful: complimentary ergonomic evaluations, home-office equipment, free child care, free pet care, stipends sizable enough to purchase Pelotons and digital personal trainers, professional coaching, teletherapy, meditation apps. The overall amount spent annually on health care by corporations numbers in the billions. In 2020, the average budget for well-being programs — splashy add-ons beyond standard health care plans — increased from 2019 by nearly 40 percent, to \$4.9 million.

Mindfulness apps like Calm, Headspace, Fabulous, Rootd and Liberate all surged over the past year, downloaded by people in search of reprieve from the crushing anxiety of the virus. Even the mere act of tapping Calm open has a narcotic effect: You can hear a thick, sonorous hum of crickets and see a picture of a serene mountain range and peaceful lake. Last April, as the world moved into a global lockdown, more than two million people paid \$69.99 for an annual subscription to the app,

which includes a selection of “daily calms,” or short talks on things like the beauty of mandalas and de-escalating conflict, breathing exercises and soundscapes with titles like “White Noise Ocean Surf” and “Wind in Pines.” To date, one of Calm’s most popular pieces of content is a 39-minute bedtime story called “Dream With Me,” read in a sensual, drowsy voice by the British pop star Harry Styles. Released in early July, it immediately crashed the app because people were so eager to listen to it.

Alexander Will, the chief strategy officer at Calm, told me that the company’s corporate partnerships saw “100 percent growth in the last year,” giving access to 10 million new people. The hype around the company secured an additional \$75 million in investment from venture capitalists, pushing the company’s valuation above \$2 billion. “Everyone has a mind, and almost everyone has a phone, and these are global issues,” Will told me. By Calm’s logic — which is shared by many app makers — we will never untether from our devices, using them for labor, connecting, community interactions, outsourcing errands. Now we reach for them to comfort us when we are anxious — even though they are often the primary source of that anxiety.

NEARLY

60 percent of Americans receive health insurance through their workplaces, a dynamic that tightly binds being cared for to being employed. The system solidified in the 1940s, an outgrowth of labor shortages during World War II, which forced companies to compete for the remaining eligible workers. A wartime freeze on wages meant it was illegal for businesses to dangle outrageous salaries; instead, they appealed with perks and benefits like health care, which were quickly determined to be free from taxation. (Europe, in ruin after the war, largely relied on government to deliver health care to the masses.)

Corporate wellness programs emerged in the 1950s to help

workers cope with alcoholism and mental-health issues and encourage them to lead more healthful lives — in order to increase productivity and cut back on the ballooning costs of medical plans and the number of days people took off from work. They’ve only grown in the decades since and become more concrete as a business strategy to placate workers with back rubs and fancy meals.

A 2010 Harvard study found that there’s a 6-to-1 return on investment: For every dollar spent on employee wellness, medical costs fall \$3.27; costs associated with absenteeism drop a few dollars as well. For companies and corporations, those numbers add up. Health care costs are expected to rise because of Covid-related issues, according to several analysts who study health insurance.

Employees who participate in corporate wellness programs do report more job satisfaction and higher levels of happiness, but there’s as much, if not more, research that suggests that our fixation on our smartphones contributes to headaches, bad posture, fatigue, depression and anxiety. Wellness, the way our culture chooses to define it, has become synonymous with productivity and self-optimization. But wellness isn’t something that can be downloaded and consumed, even if the constellations of sun-drenched photos on your Instagram feed indicate otherwise.

Kelsea Little, a senior manager of brand content for the fundraising platform GoFundMe, hosts a podcast for the company; her job involves highlighting stories to showcase and promote GoFundMe,

WELLNESS HAS BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH PRODUCTIVITY AND SELF-OPTIMIZATION, BUT WELLNESS ISN'T SOMETHING THAT CAN BE DOWNLOADED AND CONSUMED.

including campaigns to create public gardens, organize volunteer efforts for the unhoused in Los Angeles and distribute clean water in Flint, Mich. During the pandemic, this has meant sifting through thousands of stories about people getting sick, being evicted and needing money for health care, funeral costs and groceries, among other things. “Every year we have wildfire season and hurricane season, and this was worse than that combined,” she told me. “There was also the fight for racial justice and equality, and we saw an insane amount of need on the platform.”

Little has trouble sleeping in normal times, but the work during the pandemic ratcheted up her anxiety. “I’d be lying awake and thinking about all the things I’d read,” she told me. In 2020, GoFundMe added Calm to its suite of wellness benefits, and Little was an eager adopter. Mandy Moore reads her to sleep regularly. I asked Little if it’s hard to use an app to decompress after being online all day. “I’m trying to tell my brain, If I’m doing something for my health, it’s separate from the rest of my screen time,” she replied. “It’s not something we can avoid this year.”

Little’s situation — turning to the same place that is causing the unrest in the first place — is one of the biggest paradoxes of our time. Our attachment to our devices and what we see on them is often the cause of our angst. Endlessly scrolling through Netflix and checking social media notifications is not just a byproduct of boredom; it’s a function of design intended to be so persuasive that it feels urgent and impossible to stop. Technology is doing more than capturing our attention — it’s extracting whatever data it can get from us and monetizing it. Shoshana Zuboff, a social psychologist and professor emerita at Harvard, describes this as “surveillance capitalism,” the mining of private human experiences for raw behavioral data that can be sold to advertisers eager to anticipate trends in the marketplace.

Our dependency on technology has concentrated wealth in America,

making San Francisco home to the most billionaires per capita than any other city. Nearly all of them are white, cisgender men. The pay disparities that have long existed in Silicon Valley are growing, reproducing race and class hierarchies that devalue domestic and menial labor and errand work and obfuscating the human cost of increasing our ease in ordering groceries or takeout. This dystopian side stays hidden from view, which helps us ignore it and stay enmeshed with it.

Before the pandemic, the grocery-delivery app Instacart reportedly hemorrhaged hundreds of millions of dollars and struggled to turn a profit. In March, the company quickly hired 300,000 workers to meet demand at the height of the pandemic. As independent contractors, they were not eligible for health care benefits (though the company promised up to 14 paid days if they received a Covid-19 diagnosis or were required to quarantine). Instacart is now valued at more than \$17 billion; many of its workers say they are barely earning minimum wage. The pandemic may have exposed class inequalities, but the technology that caused one group of people to risk their health while others who could afford to sit at home in comfort amplified and reinforced those inequalities.

Most tech companies have a well-polished party line about how their culture supports their most vulnerable workers. Alice Vichaita, head of global benefits at Pinterest, told me the company tries to build an “inspired culture” for its workers, with a focus on emotional well-being, which it sees as “a precondition to lead inspirational lives.” During the pandemic, the mood-board search engine has offered creative mask-making tutorials and made statements in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

At the company, meanwhile, there was turmoil within: In June, Ifeoma Ozoma and Aeric Shimizu Banks, two former Black employees, aired reports of racist and sexist treatment and pay inequalities, and in August, Françoise Brougher, the company’s former chief operating officer, sued Pinterest for gender discrimination. The disconnect between the company’s outer

offerings and inner workings is revealing of a dichotomy present across the tech industry — a desire to perform solidarity rather than enact policies that demonstrate it. Pinterest did not admit to any liability in the case of Brougher (who is white), but paid out a settlement of \$22.5 million. Ozoma and Banks reportedly left with a severance of half their annual salary. There’s simply no amount of free therapy or other corporate wellness perks that can offset the toxicity of racism and sexism in the workplace.

IN

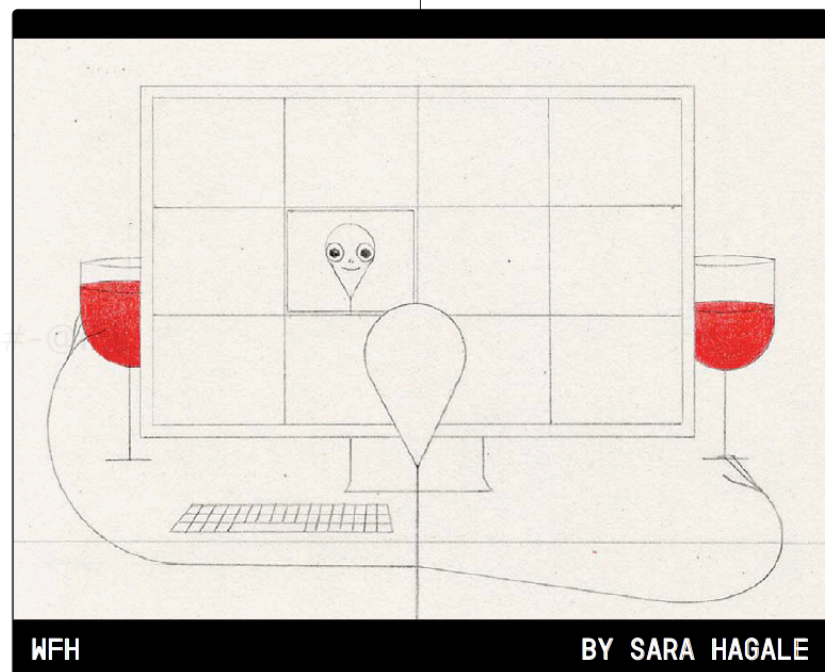
late January, I went — meaning I logged into Zoom at the designated time — to a dharma talk called “How Technology Shapes Us.” I was trying to work on the tension of relying on mindfulness mediated through an internet that is oriented toward disrupting it. The day opened with a brief sit, maybe 10 minutes. Though I’ve sat in meditation for much longer periods of time, my brain itched and did the electric slide and pretty much whatever else it wanted except dissolve into nothingness. It was impossible to become a pillar of peace while sitting in front of the void of the screen I use for work and entertainment, whose invisible and silent pull was irresistible.

“We already walk around with the seed of dissatisfaction and the

sense that something could be better,” Randima Fernando, a teacher at the dharma talk, told me later. “And the way we should navigate that sense of imperfection is taking a walk or meditating, but instead we reach for the supercomputers in our pockets.” The first noble truth of Buddhism is that life contains unavoidable suffering. The second is that it is largely caused by cravings and desire for material goods, a need that can never be satisfied. Much of technology is designed to convince users that it can reduce that suffering, through on-demand access to information, other people, food and entertainment. But more often than not, it accelerates it.

Social media, for instance, monetizes the urgency of wanting, and there are economic incentives for keeping us engaged, unhappy, seeking, convinced there’s something better to do, learn or buy. Buddhism teaches that there are no quick fixes, and apps like Calm are better at advertising relaxing services — and profiting from them — than they are at actually providing them in a meaningful way. “Mindfulness is less about reducing stress and more about reducing dissatisfaction through direct investigation of our experience,” Fernando told me. “But marketing stress reduction is more successful, and definitely more likely to win a download or corporate account.”

The pandemic decimated nearly all sectors of the U.S. economy — except the tech industry. Marketing



stress reduction became a clever grab for attention, which is now our economy's biggest commodity. Think about the companies you turned to the most for comfort. Apple, Netflix, Facebook and Zoom were among the companies that raked in billions during the pandemic. Zoom, a company few people used a year ago, is expected to report \$2.4 billion in revenue for its fiscal year that ended last month. Amazon's stock rose nearly 70 percent in the past year, thanks to Americans who shopped online to avoid crowded, contagious grocery stores. Jeff Bezos, its founder, added an estimated \$75 billion to his wealth, even as some of his employees are organizing to form a union to ensure less grueling working conditions.

Technology makes up the third-largest sector of our economy, second only to manufacturing and government. How those companies handle their business affects the rest of us, from the way they design their software to the way their employees organize within. "Changes in the shape of the workplace, in the shape of capitalism itself, have changed our expectations for what our lives will be like," the labor reporter Sarah Jaffe notes in her recent book, "Work Won't Love You Back." Life post-pandemic is still opaque. But it's clear that we will continue working from home: Only 20 percent of adult workers in America who had the option of working from home had ever done so; now more than 70 percent of them do it all or most of the time. It's likely that a vast majority will never go back entirely and that our behaviors will continue to be mined by the likes of Zoom, Spotify, Netflix and Calm.

We're already isolated from our communities, and pandemic fatigue is pushing us even farther away from one another. Corporate wellness strategies mimic the most problematic parts of wellness culture, equating care with a Wi-Fi-connected bike rather than finding ways to work together and form new models of health and care-taking that don't automatically ascribe our value to how much we can do. For many of us, work is not responsible for our freedom or even satisfaction: It shouldn't dictate our well-being, either.

Disability advocates like Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha urge us to think beyond reactive, emergency-response care — essentially our go-bag mode since March — and construct webs of care capable of "centering sustainability, slowness and building for the long haul," as she writes in her 2018 book, "Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice." After all, more of us are sick than not — 60 percent of American adults have at least one chronic illness: diabetes, an autoimmune disease, high blood pressure, cancer — and we should be operating from the standpoint that if we are serving the most vulnerable among us, we are serving the whole society. ♦

Federici

(Continued from Page 37)

Community." (The most widely known version of this essay is called "The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community" and was written by Dalla Costa and the American activist Selma James.) The essay argued that by working without pay in the home, women were producing the labor force that capitalism exploited for profit.

The notion was epiphanic to Federici. "Immediately everything made sense," she said: her mother's complaints about seeing only men in factories as authentic laborers; her own revulsion toward housework, which she hadn't yet thought of as tied to Marxism. Federici became involved with a group of feminists, including Dalla Costa and James, who called themselves the International Feminist Collective. The I.F.C. began the Wages for Housework campaign in Europe. Federici, with her collaborator, Nicole Cox, founded the first United States chapter of Wages for Housework in New York in 1974 with James's guidance.

Federici's essay "Wages Against Housework," published in 1975, was an early, impassioned manifesto for the movement and remains one of its best-known texts. "To say that we want wages for housework is to expose the fact that housework is already money for capital, that capital has made and makes money out of our cooking, smiling, [expletive]," she wrote, referring to sex. "At the same time, it shows that we have cooked, smiled, [expletive] throughout the years not because it was easier for us than for anybody else, but because we did not have any other choice. Our faces have become distorted from so much smiling."

From the start, Wages for Housework was expansive in its definition of who belonged in the feminist movement. "We want and have to say that we are all housewives, we are all prostitutes and we are all gay. ... Because as long as we think we are something better, something different than a housewife, we accept the logic of the master, which is a logic of division." Federici wrote. Her tone is almost pleading when she suggests that society needs to rid itself of the notion that some people are naturally servile or subordinate, that anything can be a "labor of love." "We want to call work what is work," she wrote, "so that eventually we might rediscover what is love."

The New York committee operated out of a storefront in Park Slope, Brooklyn, where they campaigned to improve living conditions for women in poverty. They supported the formation of other groups around the country and in Canada, and worked locally with the activists Margaret Prescod and Wilmette Brown, who formed Black Women for Wages for Housework. They campaigned together in support of welfare activists, as they considered welfare the

first victory in the struggle to demand that the government compensate women for their work in the home.

But after four years, the international network splintered. The New York committee, among others, dissolved after a falling-out with James and Prescod, who claim that the priorities of Black Women for Wages for Housework were ignored; Federici denies this, and claims the group's issue was with James.

Until very recently all parties declined to discuss the 40-year-old internecine conflict in public, convinced that it would distract from their work. This is especially sensitive terrain because of the long history of white people's dismissing and marginalizing Black, brown, Indigenous, queer and trans people within the feminist movement. Though they have never reconciled, Federici, James and Prescod went on to long, concurrent careers in feminist activism — James and Prescod within the International Wages for Housework campaign and the Global Women's Strike, among other initiatives, and Federici as an activist with the Anti-Death Penalty Project of the Radical Philosophy Association and the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa, and as a scholar at Hofstra University.

Federici's most influential book came almost 30 years later, with the publication of "Caliban and the Witch" in 2004. Many anticapitalist feminists like bell hooks, Angela Davis, Wilmette Brown and the Combahee River Collective had been arguing since the '70s that feminist struggle was necessarily anticapitalist struggle, and that anticapitalist struggle must necessarily take up gender and race because capitalism oppressed women, people of color and the working class. The contribution of "Caliban and the Witch" to this tradition was to trace these forms of oppression to a single source, arguing that their origins were inextricable.

Federici proposes a new theory about the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe, marshaling historical evidence to argue that this also was the moment when women's work was brought under the control of male heads of household and confined to the domestic sphere. Women were the ones who could birth and raise the labor force, so their autonomy, and especially their childbearing capacity, needed to be "enclosed." Then it needed to be made "natural," as if domesticity was simply women's inherent condition and desire. This transition was violent, she argues, citing thousands of women killed during that period, usually women who failed to conform to their new, radically constricted reality and were accused of being witches.

"Capitalism, as a social-economic system, is necessarily committed to racism and sexism," Federici wrote. "For capitalism must justify and mystify the contradictions built into its social relations ... by denigrating the 'nature' of those

it exploits: women, colonial subjects, the descendants of African slaves, the immigrants displaced by globalization.”

Federici argues that it’s not “natural” that the kinds of work that involve care and sustaining life were the province of any one gender; neither is it natural or inevitable that people be subjugated by an economic system that benefits a very few. These were merely conventions useful to the rise of an economic system that has become so all-encompassing that we no longer dare to imagine another way. It was made this way for someone’s profit, Federici argues. This way of things can be reversed.

[nytimes#-@il.il](#)

The last year — this plague year, this election year, this horrific year — has been a fruitful time to pay attention to who profits from our economic system, and at whose expense. In the last year, more than 70 million Americans filed for unemployment, a majority of them in the service sectors, where workers are more likely to be women of color. Low-wage workers lost their jobs at greater rates, and have stayed unemployed longer. At the same time, just over half of essential workers, who have continued working outside the home at risk to their health, are women, and disproportionately women of color. An article in Think Global Health by the scholar Catherine Powell, a law professor at Fordham, described a “racial-justice paradox” in which Black and brown Americans are “more likely to be unemployed due to the impacts of the pandemic on the labor market,” but are simultaneously “overrepresented among essential workers who must stay in their jobs, particularly lower-skilled positions, where they are at greater risk of exposure to the virus.” This paradox has cost thousands of people their lives.

In the last year, women in health care have fared worse than their male counterparts: A C.D.C. study reported that 72 percent of the health care workers hospitalized with Covid between March and May of last year were women. Many were nurses and certified nursing assistants, jobs that involve direct patient care — sponge baths, feeding, administering medication — and are more populated by women and people of color. (They’re also compensated less well than male-dominated health care jobs.) Hospital housekeeping and home health aides also got sick and died in higher numbers.

In the last year, housekeepers have faced a “full-blown humanitarian crisis.” The National Domestic Workers Alliance reported up to 60 percent unemployment in May, adding that many of its members weren’t receiving any kind of government relief because they were undocumented.

In December, 156,000 women lost jobs; men gained 16,000, according to an analysis by the National Women’s Law Center. But, as is usually the case, evaluating “women” as a general category hides something important: A further

dissection of the data revealed that it was Black, Latina and Asian-American women who suffered job losses — white women actually gained jobs. It is expected that when the vast numbers of unemployed women re-enter the job market, they will be paid lower wages than before.

In the last year, 2.3 million American women reportedly dropped out of the work force — often to perform child care when school and day care closed. Because they’ve left the work force entirely, and aren’t seeking new jobs, they aren’t counted in unemployment statistics anymore.

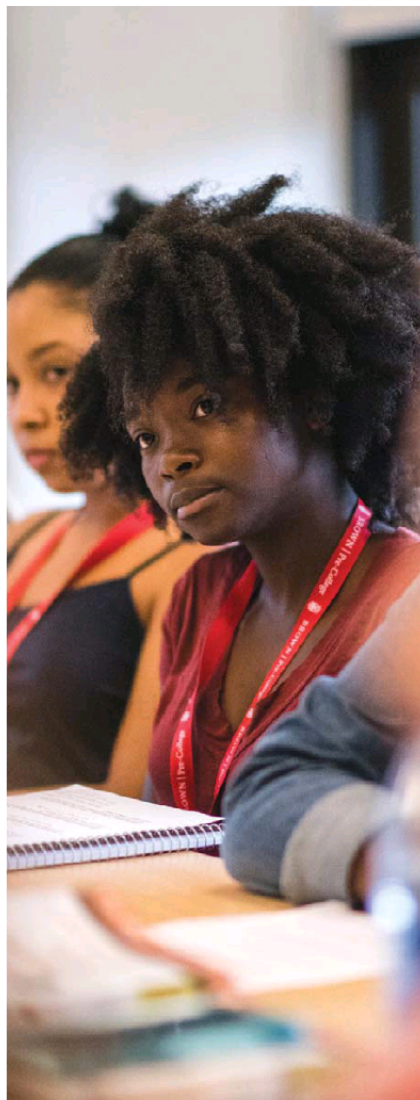
In the last year, America’s billionaires have become \$1.1 trillion richer. All this, amid perverse debates about whose lives are acceptable to sacrifice to save the economy. President Trump admitted in May that as we resumed economic activity, more people would die, but, he declared, “We have to get our country back.” Whose country? Back for whom?

It is somewhat less than surprising that there is a growing hunger for a different way, a society less stubbornly resistant to valuing human life when it stands in the way of profit for a rich, white, often male ruling class. A society “that allows millionaires to stow their wealth in empty apartments while homeless families navigate the streets,” Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor wrote in March, “that threatens eviction and loan defaults while hundreds of millions are mandated to stay

inside to suppress the virus, is bewildering in its incoherence and inhumanity.”

Taylor is among a generation of scholars and activists bringing renewed attention to the leftist, often Black-led wings of the feminist movement that were shut out by mainstream white feminism. Writing in 1984, hooks summed it up this way: “Particularly as regards work, many liberal feminist reforms simply reinforced capitalist, materialist values (illustrating the flexibility of capitalism) without truly liberating women economically.” Many writers of that era, including Hooks, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde and the members of the Combahee River Collective, insisted all along what is now widely seen as common sense: Feminism is both toothless and hypocritical if it ignores the material needs of women who are poor, Black, gay, trans, disabled, immigrants or living outside the United States. Their legacy has been taken up by contemporary social-justice activists and scholars like Taylor, adrienne maree brown, Rachel Cargle, Dean Spade and Mariame Kaba. This is where the energy of the left is now, if not a majority of the money or institutional power.

There’s a pressing question at hand, still unanswered, about how the American feminist movement will re-collect itself now, and whether it will push in an ideological direction more aligned with the thinkers it marginalized. The “liberal



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Answers to puzzles of 2.14.21

SEALED WITH A KISS

S	N	A	REDR	U	M	P	A	N	A	M	B	I	O	R	C	A	S			
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KENKEN

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4	3	1	2	5
5	2	3	4	1
1	4	5	3	2

4	5	2	3	7	6	1
1	3	4	2	5	7	6
7	6	1	4	2	3	5
6	1	7	5	3	2	4
3	2	6	1	4	5	7
5	4	3	7	6	1	2
2	7	5	6	1	4	3

ACROSTIC

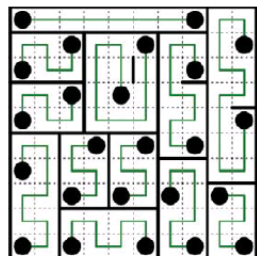
CRAIG CONLEY, ONE-LETTER WORDS — X marks the spot on a pirate's map where treasure is buried. ... [T]he archetype of a mad scientist is Dr. X. ... X is a power of magnification, an axis on a graph, and a female chromosome. ... X is a kiss at the end of a love letter.

- A. Crux
- B. Railroad
- C. A-frame
- D. I think
- E. Goonies
- F. Cantata
- G. Offset
- H. "No Exit"
- I. Life Saver
- J. E sharp
- K. Y.M.C.A.
- L. Outfox
- M. New math
- N. Espionage
- O. Lambda
- P. Exempt
- Q. Times
- R. Thanks
- S. Emphasis
- T. R-rated
- U. White Sox
- V. "O Canada"
- W. Rosaries
- X. Diopter
- Y. Spheres

DOUBLE OR NOTHING

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ROPE THREADING



Answers to puzzle on Page 60

Overpowered (3 points). Also: Drove, overdo, overdraw, overpower, overrode, peeved, peevish, popover, prove, proved, reprove, reprovved, reverse, reversed, roved, roven, veered, verve, voodoo, vowed. If you found other legitimate dictionary words in the beehive, feel free to include them in your score.

feminist reforms” of the late 20th century, which turned into the corporate feminism of the 21st. This hit its logical endpoint in the branded and sloganeered feminism of the last 10 years. There was “lean in” feminism, which held that women’s entrance into the C-suite required only the right kind of will to power and determined obliviousness to the demands of family-making. There was the swagification phase: THE FUTURE IS FEMALE T-shirts, “Nevertheless, She Persisted” baseball caps. There was the merch shop of the Wing (the “women’s space” with the high price tag, baby-pink interiors and, as employees claimed, abusive and racist internal culture) selling wildly popular “Head Witch In Charge” pins and “Girls Doing Whatever the [Expletive] They Want” key chains.

As it turns out, “girls,” or more accurately women, did not get to do whatever they wanted this year. Though — as people pointed out about the key chains — generalizing to “women” as a blanket category is a flawed prospect. (“What do you mean when you say women?” I asked Federici on one of our walks. “To me it has always been mostly in terms of a political category,” she said, defining “women” as all those who suffer under the material conditions that have historically been assigned to women, which includes trans and nonbinary people, intersex and agender people and queer people.) And years like 2020 do not fall evenly on all women.

The promises of liberal feminism have never sounded more hollow as the huge population of women who were left out of this vision entirely has grown. Gender parity in the work force (signified by equal representation or even equal pay) never materialized, and has been set back generations by the unsolved problem of domestic labor. These issues are gaining traction in the halls of power — not because they are new, but

because they now affect even middle- and upper-class women, particularly white women. Similarly, a broad interest in socialism hasn’t come about because capitalism has only just begun to harm workers, but because the gig economy and a vanished social safety net have broadened whom they harm.

“The lesson we have learned in this process is that we cannot change our everyday life without changing its immediate institutions and the political and economic system by which they are structured,” Federici writes in her book “Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons.” There are models for resisting “a social system committed to the devaluation of our lives,” she argues. There are ways to restore that value, relocating it where it was all along.

Federici still lives in Park Slope, as she has, on and off, since 1970. She met George Caffentzis in 1973, when they became roommates. Within the year they were together. Caffentzis did most of the cooking throughout their partnership until recently, when his Parkinson’s made it harder. Federici has taken up the cooking, which she enjoys more than she did in her 20s. Caffentzis loves to cook, she told me, and his pleasure in it helped her see the task as less burdensome and more beautiful. Still, she refers to these domestic tasks as “reproduction” in conversation — as in: “I do more reproduction than in the past. Before, we had a more equal share.”

Their apartment is filled with hundreds of books — on shelves but also stacked under the sofa and the bed, piled in corners, even stashed in the kitchen cabinets between the dishes. At 78, she is still active: She is editing a book about the death penalty (which she has campaigned against for years) and preparing a new book for publication: “Patriarchy of the Wage: Notes on

KENKEN

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 5x5 grid will use the digits 1–5. A 7x7 grid will use 1–7.

5+		5		1-	
1-		10*		1	
3+		15*		1-	
		9+		4	
2-				2÷	

2÷	15*		2-		2-
		3÷		12+	9+
2÷		16+			
15+		2÷		7+	1-
7			3÷		7+
3÷	5-	6+		6	2-
		15+		4	

Marx, Gender, and Feminism,” which comes out in May. Its questions are, in a way, the same questions she has been asking since the '70s: Why did Marxist critiques of capitalism so completely overlook the kinds of work that don't happen in what we generally think of as the workplace? What are the stakes of that omission?

On one of our walks, Federici told me about three years she didn't write at all. Her aging mother needed round-the-clock care, and Federici flew to Parma to join her sister in the effort. “She couldn't move. Me, my sister, all day, and there was not enough. We were collapsed at 9 o'clock, when she finally slept.”

Federici discovered that her mother, over her 14-day hospital stay, had gotten deep bed sores. “This a moment I can never forget, the desperation. What are we going to do?”

In the days that followed, as Federici and her sister dressed and cleaned the wounds themselves, took their mother back and forth from the couch so she wasn't bedridden, fed her, clothed her, bathed her, Federici's mind turned often to health care. “Imagine if we had some sort of structure in the community that could help us! This is one of the things I always had in mind: I'm here in this moment in this town in this country — there must be another thousands of women like me who are going through the same type of agony.”

She turned to me and said, with a lilt in her voice: “It's really a question of the value of life. What is valuable? What are the priorities, eh? I think unless we touch that? Unless we touch *that*. ...” After her mother died, she came home and began writing about the commons.

In the last 10 years, Federici has shifted her focus toward the need to reverse “enclosure” — the process whereby the world became divided and contained for profit. Nearly everything, Federici argues, has become “enclosed” within capitalism: not just property and land but also our bodies, our time, our modes of education, our health, our relationships, our attention, our minds. During the pandemic, as Francisco Cantú pointed out in a January *New Yorker* article citing Federici, our ability to talk to the people we love has become mediated and monetized by tech companies. The remedy for enclosure, Federici proposes, is turning more and more of the world into a commons.

“The commons” denotes resources (land, knowledge, cultural and intellectual material) commonly held outside any kind of market. Commoning is that idea in action, a practice of putting more and more of your life outside the reaches of commodification or extraction. The allure of commoning is that it's possible anywhere as long as there's a willing community: An empty lot can become a small subsistence farm, a neighborhood's health care concerns can be met with a local, neighborhood-run clinic; care work can be shared among families. “You don't

Her politics emphasize the revolutionary possibilities of telling people they can struggle for change right where they are, whether that's at home, in the supermarket, in church, in the shelter, on the production line, at day care.

need permission” to common, says David Bollier, longtime scholar of commoning. “You don't need to have proxies in Washington as lobbyists and lawyers. You don't have to be an expert — you are an expert of your own dispossession. And therefore, you can devise some of your own things that are situationally appropriate.”

The ways this could look are as various as the communities seeking to address unmet needs. Recently, a group of coders built a free online tool to help families form and schedule child care co-ops. Mutual aid networks are one iteration that has flourished during the pandemic: Using something as simple as a Google Doc, neighbors can write down what they need and what they can give, forming (or revealing) a network of symbiotic relationships. (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez co-hosted a conference call with the prison abolitionist Mariame Kaba on the basics.) These exchanges often seem mundane: Instead of your hiring a handyman, a neighbor might come to your house to help install your ceiling fan; in exchange, you might help him, or someone else, with his taxes or pet-sitting or garden work. In addition to donating to big nonprofits, you might also reply to calls on your local mutual aid network to help a neighbor make rent. While agitating for the government or other organizations to allocate desperately needed resources, your community might band together to pool and increase the resources it currently has.

Federici's models for successful commoning are drawn from an internationalist perspective, and she notes that Indigenous communities are frequently originators and keepers of

commoning practices: She cites “water defenders” in the Amazon, the Landless People's Movement in South Africa, urban gardens in Ghana, the Chilean women who pooled their food and labor amid government-mandated austerity programs. “It is not the most industrialized but the most cohesive communities that are able to resist and, in some cases, reverse the privatization tide,” she writes in “Patriarchy of the Wage.”

One of Federici's most instructive examples of commoning is the protest campaign of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in 2016 and 2017. In the course of fighting a pipeline project, the tribe and its allies built an encampment network that kept thousands of protesters housed and fed and safe, even as winter descended; they created a school for the children, recognizing that if whole families were going to participate, the children would need both care and education. In part because they made the camps a livable, long-term community, they were able sustain and amplify the effort into a movement with international support and ongoing momentum even though the camp itself was cleared by law enforcement in February 2017.

Commoning, Federici writes, produces “a powerful and rare experience as that of being part of something larger than our individual lives, of dwelling on ‘this earth of mankind’ not as a stranger or a trespasser, which is the way capitalism wishes us to relate to the spaces we occupy, but as home.”

“Too often the left doesn't see the power of communities,” she told the filmmaker and writer Astra Taylor in an interview in 2019. Her politics, which echo the methods of Wages for Housework, emphasize the revolutionary possibilities of telling people they can struggle for change right where they are, whether that's at home, in the supermarket, in church, in the shelter, on the production line, at day care. “Everyday life is the primary terrain of social change,” she writes.

Federici, when imagining the possibility of a truly just world, writes about the way collective, transformative action can match the magic worked by nature, which continually regenerates. In this sense, she continues to hold Prospect Park up as an example of creativity, possibility and beauty. When I asked, on one dark day last year, what if anything was making her feel the magic of the world, she cried: “Oh! Oh! This.” She waved her hands around in the air, gesturing at the trees, the birds, the dirt in the nearby planter currently being examined by a pair of toddlers.

Her eyes crinkled behind her mask. “The creativity of nature. And of people. I am very excited about people.” When I burst out laughing in disbelief, she protested. “There is really a lot of beauty, generosity, courage, my God. There is still joy, I see it — there is still a lot of beauty in this world. And I hope it prevails over those who only want to control and tear it apart.” ♦

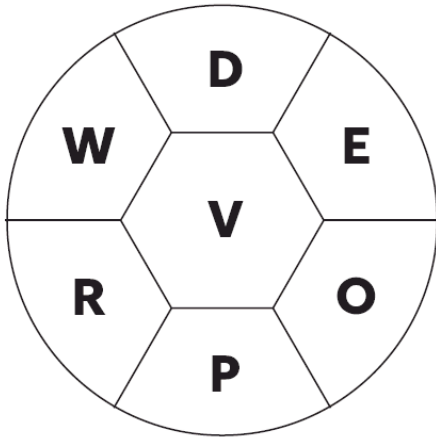
SPELLING BEE

By Frank Longo

How many common words of 5 or more letters can you spell using the letters in the hive? Every answer must use the center letter at least once. Letters may be reused in a word. At least one word will use all 7 letters. Proper names and hyphenated words are not allowed. Score 1 point for each answer, and 3 points for a word that uses all 7 letters.

Rating: 6 = good; 14 = excellent; 22 = genius

nytimes#-@ii.i



Our list of words, worth 24 points, appears with last week's answers.

TAILORED TO FIT

By Patrick Berry

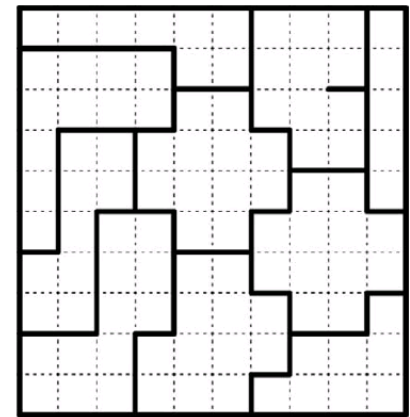
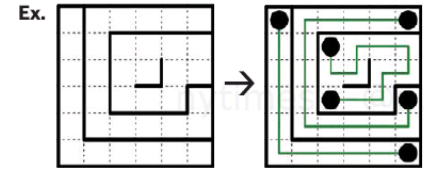
The words in the two columns below represent the missing words in 15 common phrases of the form “___ to ___,” but with one letter altered in each word. Pair each word on the left with one on the right to complete the phrases. For example, MAZE on the left could go with OLDER on the right to make “MADE to ORDER.” You may cross off the words on the right as you proceed, as each will be used only once.

- | | |
|-------------------|----------|
| 1. APPLET _____ | BITSY |
| 2. BED _____ | DUFFER |
| 3. BOXED _____ | FIGHTS |
| 4. DEAR _____ | GIVE |
| 5. FAIL _____ | GRANGES |
| 6. HARP _____ | KILT |
| 7. LEAVENS _____ | LASH |
| 8. LISTED _____ | MEDDLING |
| 9. NEWT _____ | MINX |
| 10. NONE _____ | NOSHING |
| 11. OVEN _____ | REBATE |
| 12. PRESSED _____ | RELIEVE |
| 13. QUILT _____ | SEASON |
| 14. STRING _____ | TANK |
| 15. TOKEN _____ | TSARS |

ROPE THREADING

By Prasanna Seshadri

Place two rope ends (marked as circles) in each region. Then thread a rope passing through every square of the region, proceeding horizontally and vertically, connecting the ends. No rope ends can touch, not even diagonally. The path cannot go through thick lines.



Next week: Introducing “Triangulum”

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

By Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

ACROSS

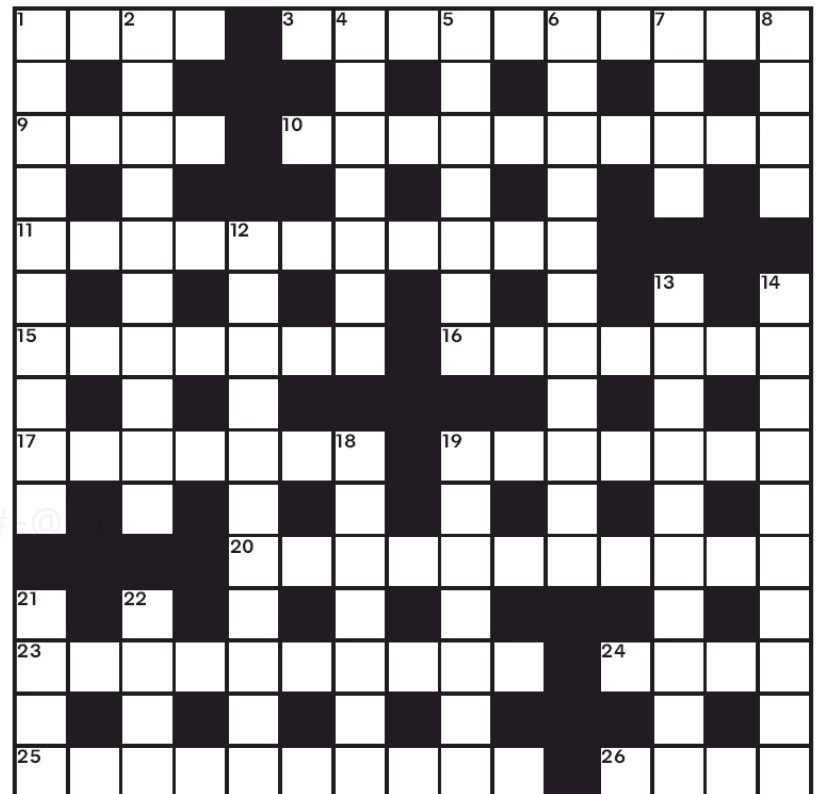
- 1 Pop fusses around (4)
- 3 Trumpet blast that announced evil woman in a horror movie (5,5)
- 9 Dappled horse galloped around ring (4)
- 10 Town clothes that aren't meant to show red hues (10)
- 11 Western jazzman's boots (11)
- 15 Corn oil stirred — vividly (2,5)
- 16 Go through repaved ground (7)
- 17 Opening in a mask I complete audibly (7)
- 19 A red part of Appalachian timber (7)
- 20 “Wild” actress won trophies after adaptation (11)

- 23 Scrooge's characteristic kind of pain? (10)
- 24 Kingsley gobbles a noodle (4)
- 25 Sooner or later, university breaks tie score (10)
- 26 Inventor in hypnotism (4)

DOWN

- 1 Trees shipmates put in certain columns (5,5)
- 2 Loaded deck shuffled, with no winners (10)
- 4 Furniture that becomes longer when you remove one piece (7)
- 5 Clique pouring liquid (2-5)

- 6 Gust of air attacks loosely knotted neckwear (7,4)
- 7 Back story recited (4)
- 8 Leaderless phantom army (4)
- 12 Said “I adore snowy locale in Britain” (4,2,5)
- 13 Poop in most uncommon woodland (10)
- 14 Appeal to baseball division's origins (10)
- 18 Land changed into sea (7)
- 19 Coolers spilled oily liquid (7)
- 21 A female Wimbledon winner (4)
- 22 Wear out the rubber part of a car (4)



Amazon

(Continued from Page 33)

2019, but by 2020, several weeks into the pandemic, his tone had completely changed. “Amazon doesn’t care about rights,” he told me. “If you don’t want to work, go out. They have a lot of people coming to work. They don’t care if somebody is working there five years, 10 years or one month.”

At various points, Tokhi’s wife begged him not to go back to work. “She knows I can’t stay home,” he said. “If I stay home, how should I pay my rent, my car insurance, my car payments. I have lots of payments.” His rent continued to climb, and he paid another \$100 a month for water and utilities. He had recently bought a car to drive to and from work. It costs \$400 a month, plus insurance — \$336 for three months. “Sometimes I can’t manage,” he said. “I can’t pay all of it. I take some money from my friends.”

Amazon pledged to increase cleaning and social-distancing rules at its warehouses. In Eastvale, it began distributing masks. As the weeks passed, Tokhi provided updates. “They give a mask now for everybody,” he said. “Some have their own, it’s OK. I have one a day. Just for one use for one day and throw it away.”

An Amazon spokeswoman recently told me the company has made ongoing changes to their safety policies. It is now conducting on-site Covid testing for employees nationwide (weekly for

California employees), as well as providing masks and placing markings on the floor to encourage social distancing. The company added even more employee-tracking measures, creating a “distance assistance” technology, which flags people on a screen with red halos if they get closer than six feet from someone else. Amazon has also stationed “social distance ambassadors” throughout the warehouses to monitor workers, and it has plexiglass mobile carts for training employees, as well as tons of hand sanitizer and mobile pop-up sinks.

But in June, Amazon ended its \$2-an-hour additional pay for all employees, with many workers going back to the baseline \$15 an hour. By October, Amazon announced that nearly 20,000 of its workers in U.S. facilities and Whole Foods stores had tested positive or been presumed positive for Covid. That same month, Cal/OSHA handed down a fine — a meager \$935 — to the Eastvale Amazon warehouse for coronavirus safety violations, after an investigation in response to the worker-led complaint. Amazon has appealed the decision, arguing that the company has been following C.D.C. guidelines and has invested in training employees on health and safety. California is conducting an ongoing investigation of Amazon’s Covid-19 protocols in the state, and in December 2020, the California attorney general asked a court to order Amazon to comply with outstanding investigative subpoenas.

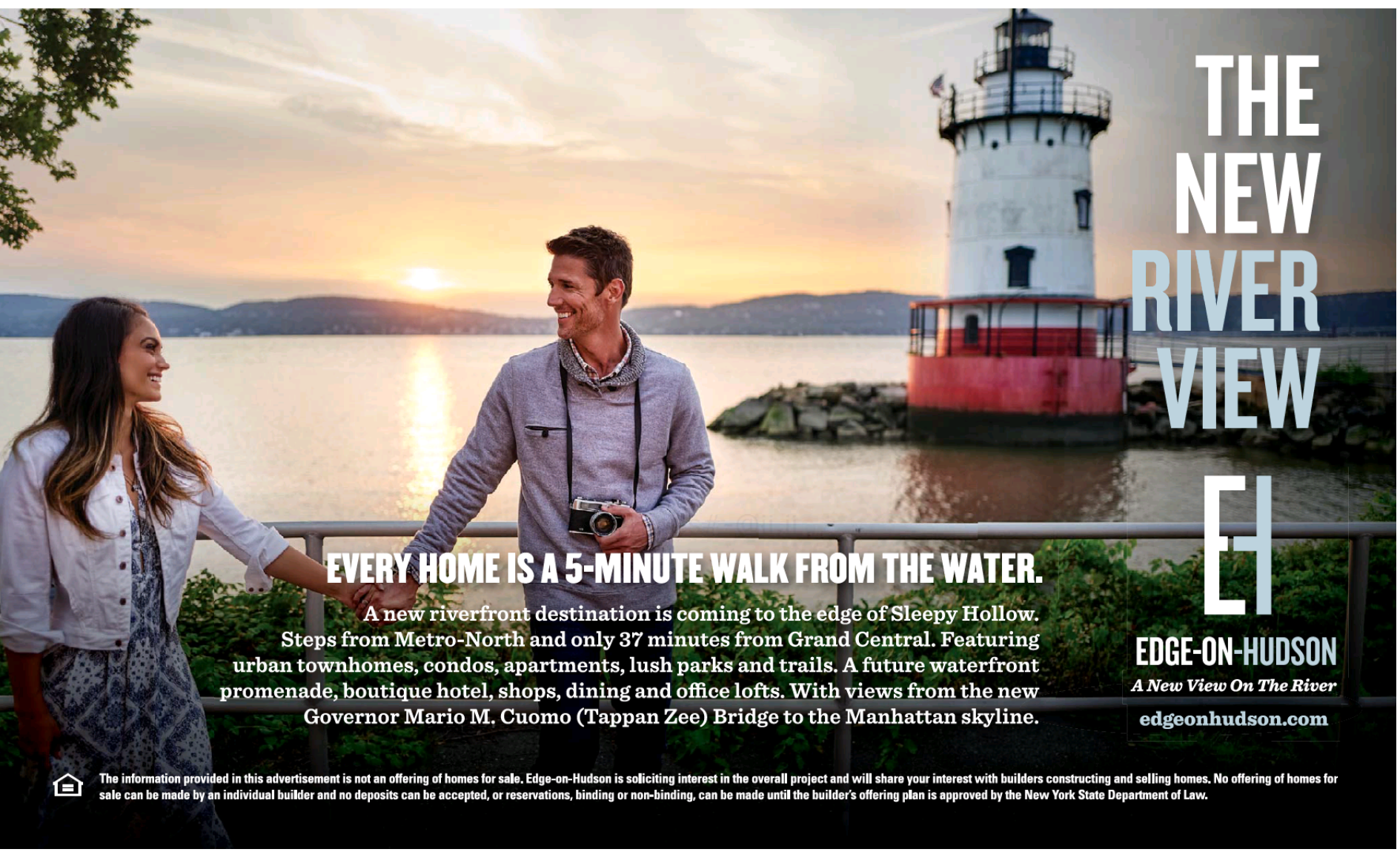
As the holidays approached, some exhausted workers in Facebook groups complained about

working Christmas and Thanksgiving. One user wrote: “I’m debating on whether I think we should unionize. Because they seem to be going out of their way to walk all over us and ignore our employee rights.” The user posted another comment: “Personally I’m not sure if a union is a good idea, but as it is I don’t think it could hurt.”

More recently, users have been posting about the upcoming vote to unionize Amazon workers in Alabama. “And that’s how they all got fired and replaced in the same day,” one user joked.

After three years at Amazon, Tokhi, whose wife gave birth to their third child in December, is now earning \$16.75 an hour. He has since transferred out of the Eastvale warehouse to a different Amazon facility, also in the Inland Empire, because he wanted to switch from picking to sorting, which he feels is less demanding. “Picking, you have to pick very fast. If you are not picking fast, your rate goes down. At end of the week you will take a warning or write-up.”

He said he feels safer from Covid now and is satisfied with all the extra sanitizers, gloves, cleanings, social-distancing measures and weekly on-site testing. Still, Tokhi said, it has been impossible to save money on his Amazon salary alone. He stopped taking his classes at the community college, at least for now, and picked up a second job on his days off from the warehouse, delivering food for DoorDash. He doesn’t plan on leaving Amazon anytime soon. “I have no choice,” he told me. “I have to do this.” ♦



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KARAOKE BARS

By Matthew Stock

Matthew Stock, 24, who is originally from Dallas, now lives in St. Louis, where he teaches ninth-grade algebra through an AmeriCorps-affiliated tutoring program. He started constructing puzzles several years ago after he attended a crossword tournament in Boston and "had a great time chatting with puzzlemakers throughout the afternoon." This is his third crossword (and first Sunday) for The Times. — W.S.

ACROSS

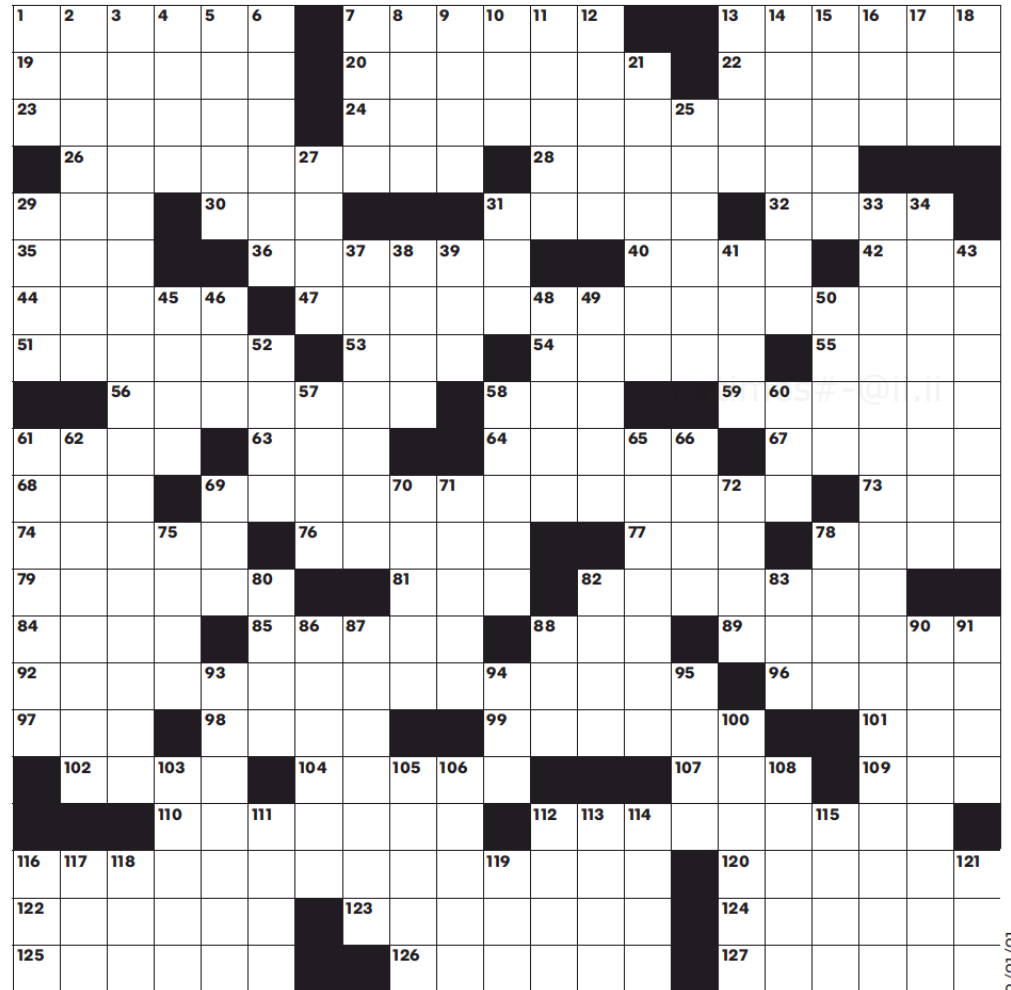
- 1 Prayer, e.g.
- 7 Market index, for short
- 13 And so on and so forth
- 19 Actor Ray of "Field of Dreams"
- 20 Like a certain complex
- 22 Relative of the mambo
- 23 High winds
- 24 Space bars? [Frank Sinatra]
- 26 Healthful dessert options
- 28 Overhauled, in a way
- 29 "___ making a list ..."
- 30 Offering in china ... or from China
- 31 "Top Chef" chef ___ Hall
- 32 Geographical name that comes from the Sioux for "sleepy ones"
- 35 First prize at the Juegos Olimpicos
- 36 Sink holes
- 40 Biting
- 42 Bird whose males incubate the eggs
- 44 Mathematical proposition
- 47 Wet bars? [Gene Kelly]
- 51 Things many people lose as they grow older
- 53 Big Five studio of Hollywood's Golden Age
- 54 "Thus ..."
- 55 St. Louis symbol
- 56 Strongly endorse
- 58 Hot place to chill
- 59 ___ Adlon, Emmy winner for "King of the Hill"
- 61 Papal name last taken in 1939
- 63 Smallest state in India
- 64 Options for outdoor wedding receptions
- 67 Like some bread and cereal
- 68 Director Lee
- 69 Prison bars? [Elvis Presley]
- 73 Bamboozled
- 74 Weight right here!
- 76 ___ Austin, Biden defense secretary
- 77 Misidentify something, e.g.

78 For the lady

- 79 Center of a court
- 81 They're often parked in parks
- 82 Relevant
- 84 Excited cry after scratching a lottery ticket
- 85 Move a cursor (over)
- 88 Pride : lions :: ___ : dolphins
- 89 Hip
- 92 Cash bars? [Abba]
- 96 "Same here"
- 97 "I mean ..."
- 98 What goes right to the bottom?
- 99 Got around
- 101 "Hoo-boy!"
- 102 Gist
- 104 Last option in a list, maybe
- 107 "That feels goo-oo-ood!"
- 109 Practice
- 110 Brainy?
- 112 A+ earner
- 116 Singles bars? [Robyn]
- 120 First House speaker from California
- 122 Not going anywhere
- 123 Was snoopy
- 124 Made square
- 125 Japanese mat
- 126 "We got permission!"
- 127 Makes insulting jokes about

DOWN

- 1 Sitcom extraterrestrial
- 2 Did a little lifting
- 3 Candy bars? [Def Leppard]
- 4 "You, too!?"
- 5 Wiped out
- 6 Stood the test of time
- 7 Mapo ___ (spicy Sichuan dish)
- 8 A leg up
- 9 Häagen-Dazs competitor
- 10 Low-wattage
- 11 Where thrills provide thrills



- 12 Something that's well-kept?
- 13 Comeback
- 14 It's turned, in a phrase
- 15 It's a relief!
- 16 Prefix with conscious
- 17 Poetic shortening
- 18 Food-pantry donation
- 21 Broad valley
- 25 Large expanses
- 27 2006 film with the tagline "Keep it wheel"
- 29 Hindu festival of colors
- 31 Most-watched TV show of 2002-05
- 33 Gold bars? [Queen]
- 34 "Do you understand me?"
- 37 Disappointing court result
- 38 Black
- 39 Habitat for Humanity is one, for short
- 41 Sister restaurant of Applebee's
- 43 Lets go of
- 45 Gaping holes
- 46 Weizenbock or Berliner Weisse
- 48 Scruffs
- 49 Ridiculous
- 50 Seventh avatar of Vishnu

- 52 It's a long story
- 57 Muddy
- 58 Beefcakes
- 60 Thumbs-up
- 61 Solving crosswords, e.g.
- 62 Insect named for the way it moves, not for its length
- 65 Got hot on Twitter, say
- 66 Kind
- 69 ___ Psaki, Biden press secretary
- 70 Gymnastics apparatus
- 71 Oral equivalent of a facepalm
- 72 Native American tribe of Montana
- 75 Single
- 78 Box score column
- 80 Noted 1815 comedy of manners
- 82 Actress Chaplin
- 83 Flag carrier to Karachi and Islamabad
- 86 Traditional Chinese drink
- 87 Anointment
- 88 Perspective, in brief

- 90 "No more for me, thank you"
- 91 Minute
- 93 Element 39
- 94 Big bleu expanse
- 95 Alumni grouping
- 100 Stylish
- 103 World capital that's home to Kotoka International Airport
- 105 World capital that's home to Noi Bai International Airport
- 106 Horror film locale, in brief
- 108 Egg: Sp.
- 111 2016 No. 1 album for Rihanna
- 112 Pop
- 113 Really thin type
- 114 ___ Domini
- 115 "I beg of you," e.g.
- 116 Bit of Morse code
- 117 Actress de Armas
- 118 D.C. pro
- 119 "Of course!"
- 121 They're checked at check-ins

Puzzles Online Today's puzzle and more than 9,000 past puzzles: nytimes.com/crosswords (\$39.95 a year). For the daily puzzle commentary: nytimes.com/wordplay.

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