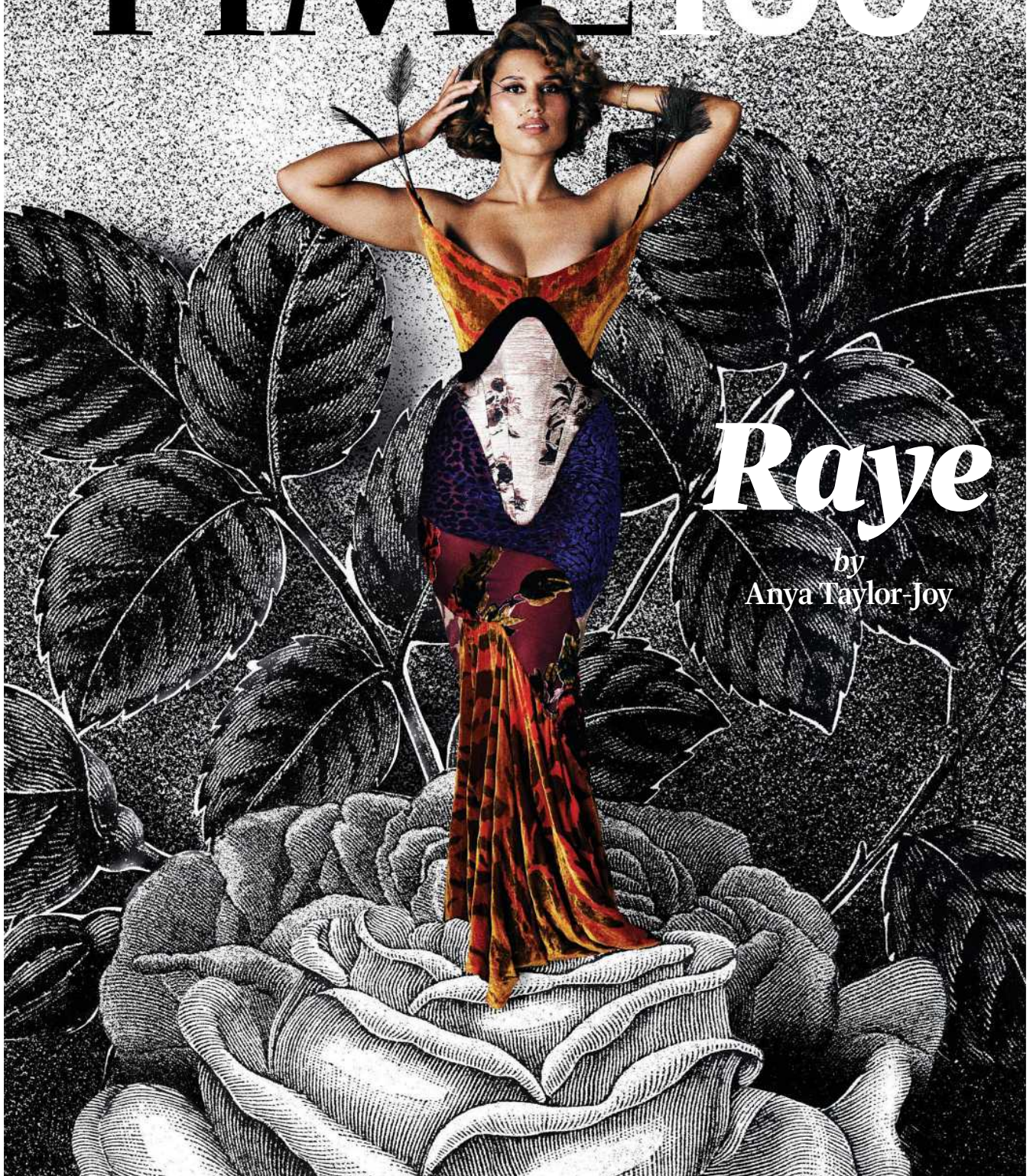


OCT. 12, 2026

THE WORLD'S MOST INFLUENTIAL RISING STARS

TIME 100 NEXT



Raye

by
Anya Taylor-Joy



It takes time to become an icon,



when you are different.

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CONTENTS

11 The Brief

21 The View

30 Pacific Command

Admiral Samuel Paparo sees his job as deterring a Chinese invasion of Taiwan by projecting American military force

By Richard Hall

38 Ruling Myanmar

Dictator Min Aung Hlaing is asking the West to validate the rule of a regime that has made the country poorer and more violent

By Charlie Campbell

44 War of Words

In the long contest over the most effective way to teach American children to read, Louisa Moats seems to be winning

By Belinda Luscombe

51 TIME100 Next

The 2026 list of the world's most influential up-and-comers—innovators, phenoms, artists, advocates, and leaders

Students at the
Defense Services
Museum in
Naypyidaw,
Myanmar,
on Aug. 26.

*Photograph by
Jes Aznar for TIME*



Grand Siècle Laurent-Perrier

Vincent van Gogh created a new way to paint the world he saw, becoming recognized long after his death for achieving some of the most beautiful works in art history.

Grand Siècle seeks a perfection, with the ambition of recreating « the perfect year », one that nature on its own will never provide.

Because of our difference, it has taken us more time and a strong belief in our vision to become recognized for what we do.

It takes time to become an icon

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Crafting the future



**We created
TIME100
Next knowing
that influence
can now
come early**

MANY OF THE PEOPLE ON TIME100 NEXT, OUR ANNUAL LIST of the most influential rising stars, seem to have come out of nowhere, somehow magicking themselves into the culture, seizing the zeitgeist, or leapfrogging their industries with little advance notice. Take our three cover subjects: the singer Raye, comedian Druski, and actor Ashley Padilla. In 2026, Raye has flown through a 51-stop tour and released a No. 1 album. Druski has leveled up his platform-perfected comedy to Hollywood. And Padilla has become a star on *Saturday Night Live* through her viral performances.

The sets for our covers, painstakingly assembled by the creative director Jana Frost, are meant to show these arrivals were anything but sudden and easy. The scenes, photographed by Stefano Giuliano this summer in London and New York City, were created entirely out of paper—with approximately 500 individual sheets of A3, weighing in at a total of 55 lb., used to create each scene. (“My scissors need some serious sharpening after these three covers,” she says.) The slow, meticulous work to build these sets echoes the deliberate effort that our three cover subjects and their fellow TIME100 Next honorees have put into their early careers. “What I really wanted was to celebrate the individual craft each talent brings,” Frost says, “the practice and the bloody hard work most people don’t see.”

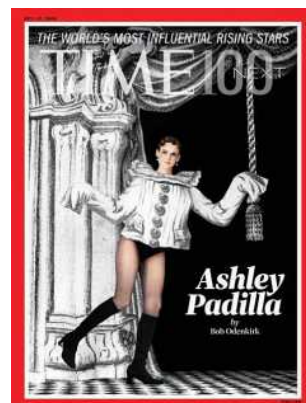
WE LAUNCHED TIME100 NEXT in 2019 with the belief that the nature of influence was changing. When the TIME100 was born at the turn of this century, influence largely derived from traditional power structures and timing. We created TIME100 Next knowing that influence can now come early and, when it does, through channels that work outside the establishment. (Among those on that first TIME100 Next: Bad Bunny, Alysia Liu, and Coco Gauff.)

This group is committed to taking risks, and with those risks can come great rewards. That includes the likes of health care worker Marie-Roseline Darnycka Belizaire, who takes her life in her hands to combat the spread of infectious disease; CEO Pawan Kumar Chandana, who launched India’s first privately developed rocket successfully into orbit; and singer Conan Gray, who transformed personal trauma into art that helps other people heal.

Our team, led by Dan Macsai and Cate Matthews, spent months working with our editorial colleagues around the world, seeking out the individuals who best represent the stories shaping our world. Among the key themes: those working to increase access to education, individuals leading the AI revolution, leaders tackling immigration, and politicians seeking to create a new kind of leadership in their own countries and around the world. We invited members of our TIME100 community, including LeBron James, Matthew McConaughey, and Angeline Murimirwa, to tell us what the impact of this new crop of leaders means to them.

Like the covers, putting this together takes time and craft. We hope the result is worth a close look.

Sam Jacobs, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Art direction and set art
by Jana Frost for TIME

Photography by
Stefano Giuliano for TIME



TURKISH AIRLINES

A WORLD OF HOSPITALITY



STAR ALLIANCE 

TIME talks health, AI, and more

At a series of events in September, in cities spanning the U.S., TIME convened leaders in fields ranging from autonomous vehicles to education. In conversations moderated by TIME journalists and editors, experts discussed how new developments in medicine, artificial intelligence, food, and education stand to shape the future we'll all share. Read more about these and all of TIME's events on time.com



Maria Shriver, founder of the Women's Alzheimer's Movement, speaks about the importance of women's brain health at the third annual **TIME100 Health Leadership Forum** on Sept. 10 in New York City.



From left: Food Systems for the Future CEO Ertharin Cousin, chef Vikas Khanna, chef Marcus Samuelsson, Bel Group CEO Cécile Beliot-Zind, and TIME's Nikhil Kumar at a **TIME100 Talks** on healthier food systems, presented by Bel Group, on Sept. 21 in NYC.



Jason Ballard, co-founder of ICON; Zoox CEO Aicha Evans; and Steve Blum, EVP and COO of Autodesk, with TIME's Kelly Conniff at the Sept. 14 **TIME Trailblazers Dinner: Designing and Making the Future**, presented by Autodesk, in Las Vegas.



Ravi Kumar S, CEO of Cognizant; Glenn Fogel, Booking Holdings CEO and president; and Doreen Bogdan-Martin, International Telecommunication Union secretary-general, with TIME editor-in-chief Sam Jacobs at the **TIME100 Impact Dinner: Leaders Shaping the Future of AI** on Sept. 14 in San Francisco.



Sesame Workshop SVP Rosemarie Truglio; Harvard professor Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff; and UNICEF global director of education Pia Rebello Britto, with TIME's Nikhil Kumar at a **TIME100 Talks** on reimagining early childhood, presented by Reliance, on Sept. 23 in New York City.

On the covers



Photograph by Philip Cheung for TIME



Digital cover

On Sept. 15, TIME published an online-only cover story about a new wave of fears over dangers AI could pose—and how the world might respond. Read at ti.me/AI-safety



Making a difference

TIME and TIME for Kids are celebrating young people who are bringing about positive change in their communities.

Now in its fourth year, the Service Stars program, made possible by the Allstate Foundation, empowers kids who are making a difference—and offers free resources to inspire all young people to make the world a brighter place. Find out more at ti.me/stars

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In TIME100 Art (Sept. 28) we misstated Susan Freedman's job title (president), who's eligible for NYC's Cultural Stability Fund (groups), and titles of works by Florentina Holzinger and Lauren Halsey, as well as miscrediting the opening of Halsey's project.

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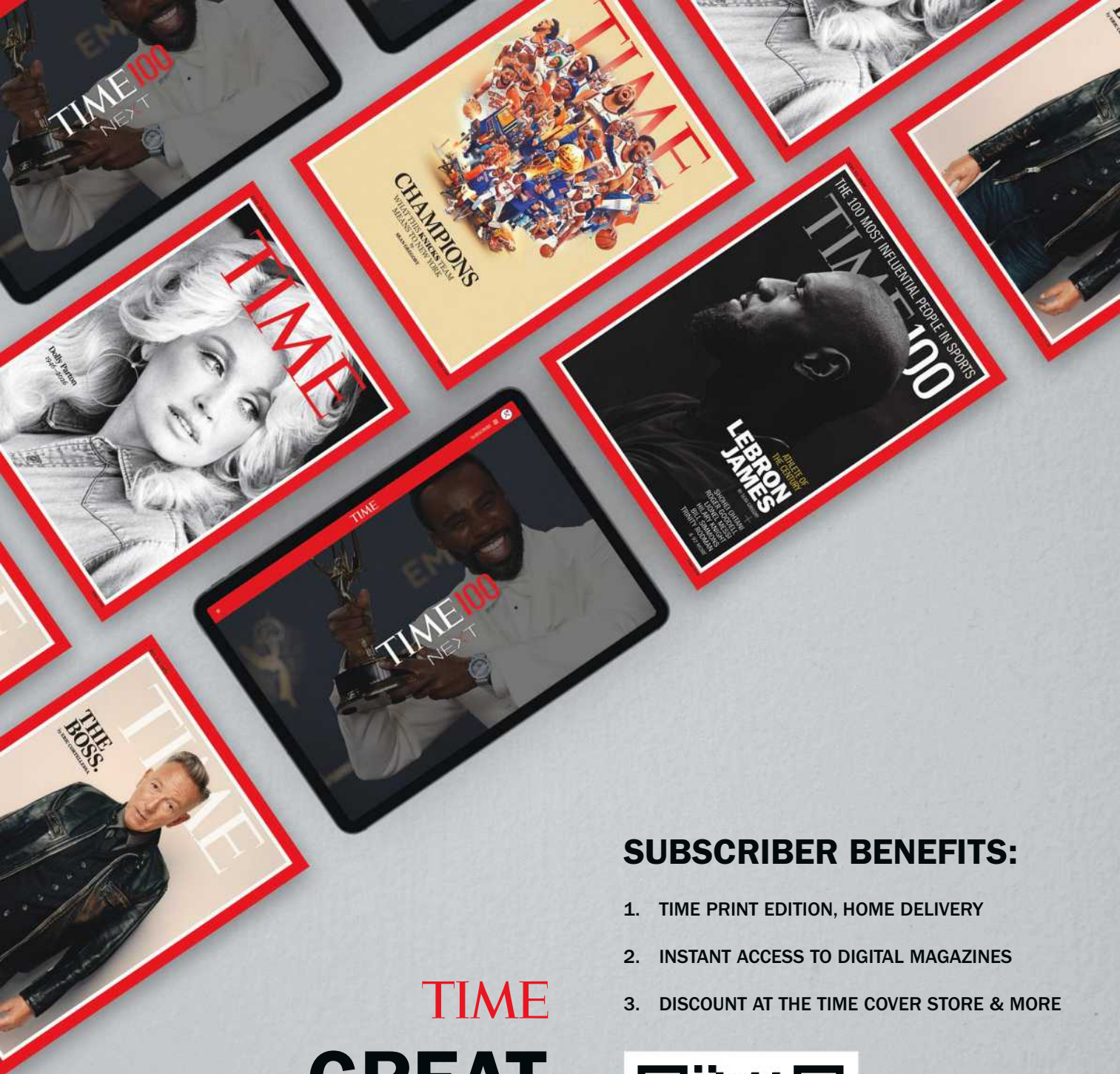
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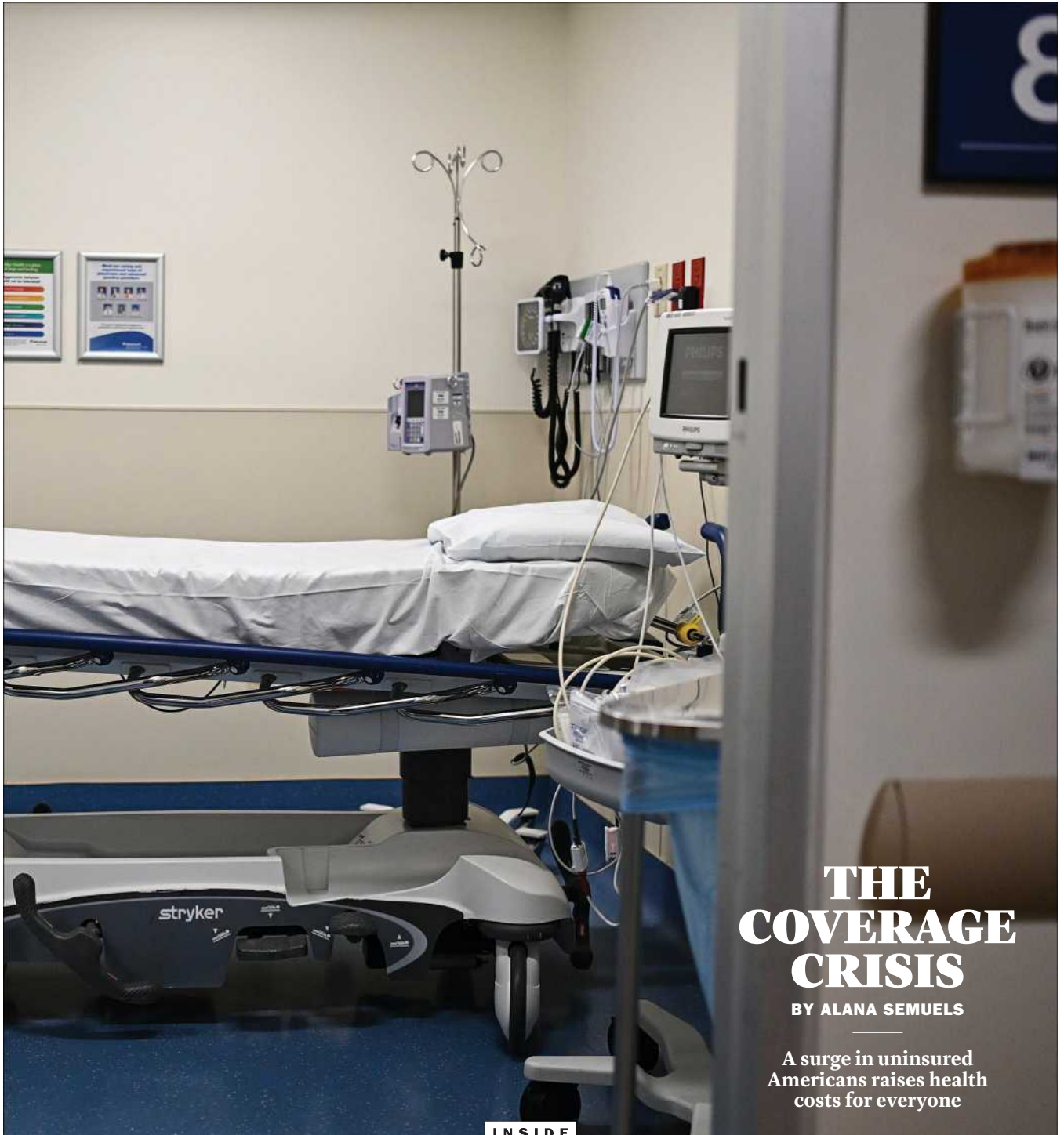
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The Brief



THE COVERAGE CRISIS

BY ALANA SEMUELS

A surge in uninsured
Americans raises health
costs for everyone

INSIDE

CARNEY PIVOTS CANADA
TOWARD EUROPE

PUTTING A PRICE TAG
ON THE WAR IN IRAN

THE TECH & DATA EXECUTIVES
MAKING WAVES IN 2026

WHEN HOSPITALS CLOSE, PATIENTS SEEKING medical care have to find somewhere else to go. That's what happened in 2007 when King Drew, a safety-net hospital in South Los Angeles, ceased operations because of safety and quality problems.

Soon after, other hospitals in South Los Angeles saw higher volumes of patients, many without insurance; one hospital's share of uninsured patients more than tripled, from about 13% to nearly 45%, a study found. This redistribution of sick people led to severe overcrowding in other hospitals and higher costs for insured patients.

Many hospital administrators are now bracing for this dynamic to play out across the country as cuts from H.R. 1, also known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, ripple across the U.S. health care system. H.R. 1 makes it more difficult for people to stay on Medicaid by introducing work requirements and by demanding that people reconfirm their income and address every six months, rather than every year. It also reduces the amount of state funding hospitals receive through the Medicaid program.

MLK Community Hospital, for instance, which has since opened on the same footprint where King Drew was located, will lose between \$80 million and \$100 million a year because of cuts to Medicaid, according to its CEO, Dr. Elaine Batchlor.

She's scrambling to find funding from elsewhere, including from a new 5% sales tax recently passed in Los Angeles County to fund local health services. She's determined to keep MLK Community Hospital open, but she knows not every hospital will be successful in doing so. One analysis found that more than 300 rural hospitals are at risk of closing because of H.R. 1.

What Batchlor wants people to know is that an increase in the number of Americans who are uninsured doesn't affect just the people losing that coverage. It affects everyone. More uninsured people means more of a financial burden on hospitals. And when hospitals face financial distress, they cut back on services, often ob-gyn and preventive care.

Or they close altogether. The patients once served by those hospitals "will go to hospitals in other neighborhoods," she says, "and those emergency departments will become more crowded." In addition, people without insurance tend to avoid seeking health care until they have to, which ends up being more expensive in the long run.

"It's \$2,500 to do a colonoscopy, but it's \$130,000 to treat someone for Stage IV colon cancer," says Dr. Erik Mikaitis, CEO of Cook County Health, one of the largest public health systems in the nation. Already, Cook County

Health—which runs two hospitals and a dozen community health centers in Chicago—has seen an increase from 19% of patients being uninsured to 25%, just since January. Mikaitis is worried that instead of managing patients' diabetes and high blood pressure, doctors will be seeing more patients with strokes and heart attacks.

As a result, he predicts, people going to the emergency room for anything will see longer wait times, especially as health systems close clinics and hospitals that are losing money.

"This isn't just a Medicaid problem," he says. "There's going to be this cascade of failure in terms of access. You're going to see people in the hallways waiting to be seen."

THE U.S. IS FACING its most serious health-insurance crisis since the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010. It's not just that H.R. 1 is projected to make more people lose Medicaid coverage; Congress decided not to renew subsidies for the Affordable Care Act in 2026, meaning thousands of families are seeing the cost of insurance skyrocket and are deciding to drop coverage rather than pay hundreds or thousands of dollars a month for it. All told, the Congressional Budget Office expects 10 million more people to be uninsured by 2034.

People without health insurance may forgo primary care, checkups, and other preventive measures and might show up at the hospital only once they're so ill that treatment can run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. If the patient can't pay that debt, it falls onto hos-

pitals now facing more uninsured patients.

Hospitals often pass the costs on to insured patients by charging insurers more for services, studies have found. Insurance premiums reflect this. A Sept. 2 report by Marsh, the consulting firm formerly known as Mercer, estimates that the cost of health-insurance plans to employers will increase by 11% in 2027—the biggest jump in decades—and that many employers will then pass those costs on to their workers. "Lower government funding and reimbursements in public health programs are also driving higher charges or care in employer plans," the report found. That means even people with private insurance are likely to see costs rise.

The impacts of the insurance crisis won't stop at Americans' wallets, experts say. Everyone is likely to face longer waits and fewer available services as hospitals and medical systems sag under the weight of more uninsured.

"We'll all be worse off for having let people get sicker and needing more expensive care: ending up with amputations, or needing chronic dialysis," Batchlor says. "None of that is really what we should be doing as a society." □

'There's going to be this cascade of failure in terms of access.'

—DR. ERIK MIKAITIS,
CEO OF COOK
COUNTY HEALTH



The droids they were looking for

Visitors take a photo with R2-D2 and C-3PO at the “Star Wars in Motion” exhibit during the sold-out opening day of Los Angeles’ new Lucas Museum of Narrative Art on Sept. 22. The museum, founded by filmmaker George Lucas and his wife Mellody Hobson, is billed as the “first museum dedicated to the universal human tradition of visual storytelling.”

THE BULLETIN

Canada’s plan to be more than just friends with the E.U.

CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER MARK Carney has welcomed the prospect of Canada becoming the first “associate member” of the E.U., as he aims to strengthen international ties amid a deepening trade war with the U.S. “Europe and Canada are stronger together,” Carney (*right*) told the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, in an address on Sept. 17.

CANADA’S PITCH “We are not fair-weather allies,” Carney said of Canada’s alliance with the E.U., alluding to the extraordinary split with the U.S. driven by President Donald Trump. “We believe that our prosperity grows when it is shared.” Carney promised “deep cooperation in the full range of strategic capabilities,” including on critical minerals and AI. European

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the alliance—an “urgent” reimagining of the relationship—would be a “partnership not against anyone else, but for our common strength.” The E.U. took shape after World War II as a supranational body created to prevent future wars via trade and consensus governance; its 27 members are all in Europe.

A NEW ERA The European Commission’s executive cabinet will work “in close coordination with [its] member states and the European Parliament” to “create a new form of partnership,” a spokesperson told TIME. It’s not yet known exactly what that

partnership will look like, but experts predict Canada may take inspiration from other countries that have close relationships with the bloc without being E.U. members. Iceland and Norway, for example, are part of the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement, allowing them to be part of the E.U.’s single market.

U.S. TENSIONS Trump dismissed the proposal as “laughable” and threatened economic punishments if the E.U. moves forward with the plan. “If they do that, if I think it’s at all a hostile act, I will put very serious tariffs or stop trading with Europe on many things,” he warned.

—TIAGO VENTURA and OLIVIA-ANNE CLEARY



GOOD QUESTION

How much has the war in Iran cost the U.S. so far?

BY NIK POPLI

SEVEN MONTHS INTO THE WAR WITH IRAN, THE U.S. IS beginning to see the breadth of what the conflict is consuming. Eighteen U.S. service members have been killed as of mid-September. Two new government reports also show that the military has already spent tens of billions of dollars and burned through large quantities of sophisticated weapons, including air-defense interceptors that could take years to replenish, and that continued fighting is adding billions of dollars to the cost each month.

The Congressional Budget Office, the nonpartisan agency that provides economic and budget estimates to Congress, estimates that the U.S. spent roughly \$38 billion on the conflict through Aug. 1. A Pentagon inspector general report put the cost through June 30 at \$33.4 billion. Together, they provide the clearest accounting yet of a price tag for the conflict, though the true figure will rise as the fighting goes on: CBO estimates an additional \$2 billion to \$3 billion in costs each month, depending on the intensity of combat. It also estimates that replenishing depleted weapon stockpiles could take five years or longer. Replacing billions of dollars in destroyed or damaged aircraft and other equipment adds to the cost.

The bulk of the CBO estimate—\$21.7 billion—comes from replacing expended munitions, including \$13.1 billion for missile-defense interceptors and \$7.3 billion for land-attack cruise missiles. It also tallied the expense of increased flying hours, transportation, and fuel. The Pentagon inspector general separately estimated that repairing physical damage from Iranian strikes to U.S. diplomatic facilities in Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates would cost about \$184 million. It also found that the military had spent \$22.3 billion on munitions and lost about \$3.7 billion in aircraft and equipment, including four F-15 fighter jets, seven KC-135 tankers, and up to 30 MQ-9 Reaper drones. The report said the war had created strategic inventory shortfalls and exposed bottlenecks in the defense industry's ability to replenish supplies. Administration officials have denied claims of a shortage, even as the Defense Department has urged weapons manufacturers to increase production.

THE FIGURES COME as President Donald Trump's Administration faces questions about the war's duration and future funding. The CBO estimate is lower than some early

A U.S. Air Force crew member monitors an aerial refueling near the Strait of Hormuz on April 21



projections of what the conflict could cost, giving the Administration an argument that the direct military price of the war has so far been more limited than some critics had feared. But even at nearly \$40 billion, Democrats argue the cost is outrageous given how the war has played out.

Democrats say they expected the estimates to be higher, on the assumption that the reports would include the cost of borrowing to finance the fighting. They note that the government debt now stands at \$40 trillion, and point out what the money could have funded instead. Representative Brendan Boyle of Pennsylvania, ranking member of the House Budget Committee, contrasted the war's cost with the less-than-\$40 billion price

of extending Affordable Care Act tax credits for a year. "I think that's wrong on policy and terrible politics for them," he tells TIME.

The cost also reaches beyond the Pentagon. CBO estimates that higher energy prices resulting from disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea will add roughly 0.5 percentage points to inflation in the first quarter of 2027. Consumer prices rose 3.4% over the year through August, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and gasoline prices rose 3.9% in August alone.

Trump has more recently asked Americans to accept higher prices as the cost of preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. His assurances about the duration of that sacrifice, however, have changed.

In March, he described the conflict as a "short-term excursion" that would end "soon." Later, the White House requested \$67.1 billion in additional Pentagon funding, while House Republicans advanced a framework with roughly \$73 billion in additional defense and intelligence spending.

Speaking in Dallas in early September, Trump said the war would end "immediately after" the midterm elections. □

'Wrong on policy and terrible politics for them.'

—REPRESENTATIVE
BRENDAN BOYLE

BANNED

Journalists for **CNN, MS NOW, and Politico** from the **White House** on Sept. 18 by President Donald Trump, who complained about their coverage; other outlets suspended pool coverage in solidarity. A U.S. district judge on Sept. 24 ordered the ban paused.

DIED

Author **Annie Dillard**, who won a 1975 Pulitzer for *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, on Sept. 15 at 81.

SETTLED

An antitrust suit by 12 state attorneys general to bar Paramount's **\$11.1 billion acquisition of Warner Bros. Discovery**, on Sept. 21—though a judge's approval would be needed for the deal to proceed.

SIGNED

A defense deal between **Greenland and the U.S.** on Sept. 22 at the U.N. General Assembly, allowing Washington to build two new military bases in the Danish territory.

SENTENCED

Disgraced Hollywood producer **Harvey Weinstein**, to 15 years in prison for a felony sex crime, on Sept. 23. Weinstein, who also faces resentencing in California, says he will appeal.

WON

A third state election victory by **Germany's far-right AfD party**, in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Sept. 20, bringing it closer to regional power than any far-right party in the country since World War II.

**CLOSED**

The Kennedy Center *Curtains, for now, at D.C. institution*

ALMOST EXACTLY 55 YEARS AFTER THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER for the Performing Arts opened its doors, its run as a lauded Washington, D.C., arts institution came to an end, at least for the time being, when its board voted Sept. 15 to immediately close its main building. The decision came hours after a U.S. District Court blocked the board's latest effort to, without Congress's approval, add President Donald Trump's name to the outside of the building.

Trustees had linked the naming fight to the institution's financial future, claiming that without Trump's name on the edifice, the center could be weeks away from bankruptcy. "It is unlikely that President Trump will provide the fundamental oversight of the renovation of the main building and lead the fiscal rescue of the Center," they said. A judge rejected the claims, saying the defendants offered "no proof that current or future donations hinge on President Trump's name being on the building."

Congress had already appropriated \$256,657,000 in taxpayer funding for repairs to the Kennedy Center in July 2025. The funds are available through Sept. 30, 2029.

Theater historian Charlotte Canning, of the University of Texas at Austin, says she believes any financial problems at the Kennedy Center are a consequence of Trump's institutional takeover in February 2025. She also warns that any recovery would take time. "It's very easy to destroy something—that can be done in literally a year," she says. "Rebuilding is much, much, much more difficult."

Trump, meanwhile, hinted it would be not just difficult, but impossible—implying he might demolish the building if the re-naming efforts don't advance. "The Trump Administration should certainly have recognition," he told reporters Sept. 16. "Because frankly, if we don't do that, it's going to close. It will end up being ripped down." —REBECCA SCHNEID and T. MICHELLE MURPHY

DECLARED

State of emergency *As El Niño looms*

The Pacific Ocean weather phenomenon known as El Niño typically brings wetter, more intense winters to California. As climate change supercharges weather events, El Niño is no exception: climate scientists say the one now developing is the strongest on record. With severe storms in the Golden State possible and coastal flooding already occurring, Governor Gavin Newsom on Sept. 22 declared a state of emergency.

The declaration allows the government to mobilize local resources to fight floods, prepare the National Guard to assist with search and rescue efforts, and fortify roads and other infrastructure. State environmental agencies will also fast-track permitting, among other efforts to prepare for flooding and landslides.

"Every Californian deserves to be safe in their home, connected to their community, and protected when severe weather comes," Newsom said.

—Simmons Shah



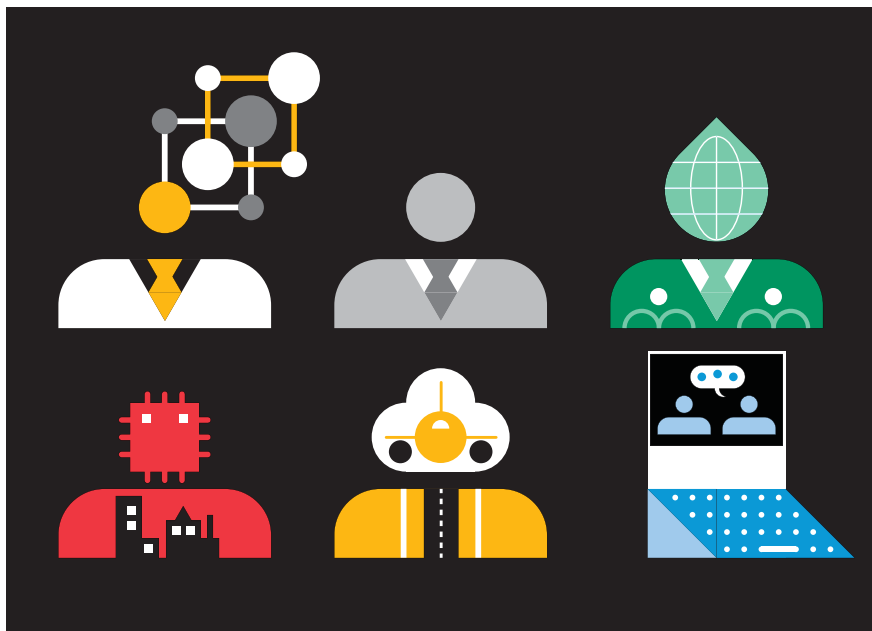
Strikes on Ukraine

Crews battle a fire at the Intrade shopping center in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, on Sept. 21, after Russian forces struck the city using unmanned aerial vehicles and a first-person-view drone. Six people were injured in the attack, which destroyed the shopping center and damaged a university building and a multistory residential block. Russia had vowed to intensify attacks after Kyiv launched hundreds of armed drones on Moscow a day earlier in its largest attack since the Kremlin launched the war on Ukraine in 2022.

Photograph by Dmytro Smollenko—NurPhoto/Reuters







The people behind today's biggest corporate changes

BY AVERY STONE

AT A MOMENT WHEN EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES ARE driving both the global economy and the news cycle, business leaders must not only keep up with an industry moving at a breakneck pace—they must also look around the corner at what's next. That's why TIME is publishing its first-ever **Executives of the Year: Tech & Data** list, recognizing 50 leaders shaping the future of technology, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital innovation across industries.

Among them are **Bartley Richardson**, CrowdStrike's chief AI and autonomous systems officer, who is heading up a new AI research lab dedicated to building autonomous cybersecurity systems, and Reddit chief technology officer (CTO) **Amit Puntambekar**, who is shepherding AI adoption at one of the internet's largest repositories of human conversation. At pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly & Co., **Diogo Rau** oversaw the effort to build a supercomputer called LillyPod, which models biological processes and screens potential molecules before promising candidates enter wet-lab experiments. Meanwhile, at OpenAI, **Vijaye Raji**, CTO of applications, is in charge of key technical teams that help power the ubiquitous ChatGPT, as well as the coding tool Codex.

TO CREATE THE LIST, our editors and reporters across the newsroom evaluated the scale of each leader's responsibilities, the significance of the investments and initiatives they oversee, and their demonstrated impact on how their organization operates, competes, and grows. What came together was a group of executives tasked with modernizing legacy systems and digital infrastructure. Those leaders include **Monica Caldas**,

Liberty Mutual's global chief information officer, who is rewiring the century-old insurance company for what she calls "the intelligence era," and **Ogi Redzic**, who joined Caterpillar Inc. as SVP and chief digital officer in 2018 and has helped the equipment manufacturer rebuild itself around data to address customers' labor and safety issues.

The list also highlights the creation of new or expanded roles designed to meet the fast-evolving moment. There's **Kathleen Grace**, named Lionsgate's first-ever chief AI officer in February and the first Hollywood studio executive to hold that particular title, as well as Delta's **Amala Duggirala**, who joined the airline in January as EVP and chief digital and technology officer—a brand-new role overseeing its recently combined digital and technology organizations, encompassing both the enterprise technology that powers its global operations and the digital tools it creates for customers and employees alike.

Beyond the U.S., tech executives across Asia, Africa, and Europe are driving innovation. At Singapore-based Grab, CTO **Suthen Thomas Paradatheth** has helped the company transition from a ride-sharing platform to a superapp that processes millions of transactions a day across Southeast Asia. **Felix Ike**, co-founder and CTO of the Nigerian fintech company Moniepoint, has helped to establish the business as one of Africa's leading financial platforms. At Paris-based Back Market, a global online marketplace for refurbished electronics, CTO **Dawn Baker** is applying an environmental mission to the company's use of computing power. "We have to make sure we're not using more than we need," she says. "It's about using AI smartly and not falling for the hype."

These leaders and their fellow honorees are the catalysts of some of the most consequential transformations taking place across modern enterprise—translating innovation into meaning.

These leaders are bringing legacy systems into the future

Find the full *Executives of the Year: Tech & Data* list at ti.me/execs-of-the-year-tech

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CISO OF THE YEAR



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Ask Alex Levy, the first TIME + Commvault CISO of the Year.**

Congratulations to Alex Levy, CISO, BNSF Railway.

In a year when AI is remaking how business operates and redefining the demands on security, Alex is taking bold steps to meet the challenge. Reimagining resilience as the way his organization is designed and led before the crisis. Moving it from reactive response to a continuous operating process of recovery. We salute Levy for preparing his organization for an AI-driven future.

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real value
unlocked

by the
hands that
shape it?

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Engine



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with confidence

The View

CLIMATE

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

BY SOLITAIRE TOWNSEND

Earlier this year I stood in a drafty sports hall, facing rows of 10-year-olds sitting cross-legged on the scuffed floor. I asked them a question: “What does climate change mean?” Small hands shot up: “The sea rises and floods everything,” one child said. “Fires are gonna burn all the forests,” another added. “We all die.” The litany of apocalypse continued until I interrupted with a second question. ▶

INSIDE

XI CULTIVATES THE WORLD
TRUMP PUSHES AWAY

A GENE FOR LUNG CANCER
IN NONSMOKERS

TIPS ON READING
THE ROOM

“And what do we do about it?”

Silence. After some shuffling, one girl tentatively offered: “Solar panels?” Then a louder boy called out, “Recycle!” His classmates nodded.

And that was pretty much it. I’ve worked in climate communication for nearly 30 years, interspersing sessions with CEOs, activists, and politicians with talks to schoolkids. Over those decades, I’ve watched the average 10-year-old acquire an increasingly sophisticated picture of the climate crisis they will inherit. Many of them seem to understand climate science better than some CEOs. But ask these children to picture what we do about it, and their extraordinary imaginations contract to a recycling bin.

To be clear, I am enthusiastically in favor of recycling—just not as our answer to a planetary emergency. But I understand why I’m still hearing that inadequate response. Since global warming first entered mainstream public consciousness in the 1980s, we’ve offered people ever more detailed maps of the apocalypse with barely a sketch of the way out.

The climate movement, of which I’m a proud member, has been complicit in this communication crisis. Most messages shared by progressive forces are merely an ad nauseam echo of: climate change is real, humans are to blame, and the consequences are catastrophic. I call this framing the *earned dystopia*, and it’s so ubiquitous, most preteens can parrot it.

Can we not imagine a different story? Storytelling has been treated as the spoonful of sugar to help the scientific medicine go down, the marketing department for climate science.

But climate change has started communicating itself. Horrifying floods, fires, storms, and droughts capture headlines without my help. The logic of the climate crisis is clear. What we’re missing is the magic.

Long before humans measured atmospheric carbon, we whispered tales of flood and fire. Stories have always helped us understand who we are and what we might become.

Today, we don’t particularly lack information about heat pumps, electric vehicles, or regenerative agriculture.



More details than you could ever want are just a click away. What we’re missing is an emotional architecture for change; how it feels to want a different future and to believe we can reach it.

That’s where great storytelling could change everything. Our ability to enter a story and temporarily experience the character’s world as our own is called narrative transportation. Studies prove that this experience of emoting along with fictional people can directly influence real people’s attitudes, intentions, and even our behaviors. Few other mechanisms can achieve the same effect.

CLIMATE POLITICS HAS SENSED this power, but translated it into the narrower language of “public narrative.” Politicians now plot narratives for electrification and renewables. Campaigners construct counternarratives to fossil fuels. Brand teams test sustainability narratives against each other. In climate circles, everyone is searching for the breakthrough narrative that will finally unlock action. But too often the term is simply a cipher for messaging. And messaging is not the same thing as mythology.

A political narrative tells us how to understand an issue, while mythology

helps us understand ourselves.

And climate change is mythological in scale. It contains terrifying monsters, underdog heroes, unexpected allies, destruction, rebirth. The problem is a surprisingly small shelf of fables that foreshadow a better ending. We need a plot twist in climate storytelling, moving beyond the threat and into the thrilling adventure of solving it.

That’s a job for storytellers. Culture-makers are beginning to catch on. I’ve been invited by television and film writers, social media creators, and brands to help climate solutions appear in comedy, drama, adventure, and everyday life. Ever more box-office hits, like *The Wild Robot*, *Avatar*, and the upcoming *Digger*, reflect our fight against climate and nature crises. *Sesame Street* is helping kids cope with extreme weather. New climate novels weave answers into stirring world-building. These all work because they are above all compelling and moving stories, not climate-science lectures dressed in a thin veil of narrative.

Climate solutions are the most important story of this century. Tell it.

Townsend is a climate entrepreneur and author of petrol-punk novel Godstorm



The Risk Report

By Ian Bremmer

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

CHINA'S XI JINPING HAS BEEN ON quite a road trip. His Sept. 24 visit to the White House and his meeting with President Donald Trump came amid a burst of international travel that has included a leading role at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Kyrgyzstan, a visit to Egypt aimed at mediating the ongoing war in the Middle East, and the BRICS summit in New Delhi.

Xi's diplomatic blitz comes at a moment when Trump seems determined to antagonize friends and foes alike with tariffs, threats, and insults.

A recent poll across 34 countries commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation found that only 39% of people were comfortable with the U.S. playing a leading role in global affairs.

Can China's globe-trotting leader present his country as a stable and credible alternative?

To do so, he must earn the trust of governments scrambling for ways to hedge against their excessive reliance on an increasingly unreliable Washington. Beijing's relative policy predictability strengthens Xi's case at a time when the U.S. has become prone to sharp ideological swings from one election to the next. American voters once regularly rewarded Presidents with two terms, but in the decade since Barack Obama, they have swung from Donald Trump to Joe Biden, and then back to Trump.

Since 2000, the White House or at least one house of Congress has flipped party control in 11 of the past 13 national elections. Xi, by contrast, has been in power since 2012 and looks set to remain there for the

foreseeable future. And while other world leaders have recently made impulsive decisions that produced unanticipated consequences for international security and the global economy—from Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine to Trump's war with Iran—Xi has been something closer to a model of caution in foreign and security policy.

For all that, do other governments trust Beijing and welcome its expanding influence? Europe,



Xi and Trump at the White House on Sept. 24

Japan, Canada, and Australia want trade with China but mistrust its political values and geopolitical intentions. In the Middle East, China brought Saudi Arabia and Iran together to normalize their relations in 2023. That achievement is now on shaky ground, to put it mildly, particularly as Iran's allies in Yemen, the Houthi rebels, threaten to renew their war with the Saudis. Until China is willing to take greater risks in pursuit of peace, whether in the Middle East or Ukraine, its influence will remain limited.

The recent BRICS summit best illustrates the limits of China's clout.

Xi stands tall in a group that includes India's Narendra Modi, Russia's Putin, and the leaders of Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and several other countries. All of them want constructive relations with China, but their interests do not closely align with Beijing's.

THANKS TO ITS green-energy innovations, China has become an important exporter of energy technologies. But the Iran war has eroded its strategic oil reserves, and China still needs lower oil prices to protect its heavy-lifted economy. Oil exporters such as Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Iran all want higher prices. Xi also

hopes to persuade other governments to hedge against the dollar's enduring dominance as an international reserve currency by promoting more channels for non-dollar lending and greater use of the renminbi to settle trade. India, China's long-time rival, is not interested. Border tensions between China and India, which have occasionally turned violent, have eased in recent months, but they have flared unexpectedly before. Finally, China's many neighbors remain anxious about its

power plays in the South China Sea.

Consider, finally, that recent poll on global leadership. Though international support for a leading U.S. role stands at 39%, the same sample of 34,000 people found support for Chinese leadership is just 37%. More than 60% of respondents said they want countries to work together without the participation of either Washington or Beijing.

That is a signal that few governments today want to become excessively dependent on a great power for their security and prosperity. Most will warily court both while keeping their options open. □

SOCIETY

Philanthropy must build the architecture of hope

BY NITA M. AMBANI

I GREW UP IN A MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILY IN MUMBAI, where my parents taught us the importance of giving back. Our success, they insisted, was meaningful only if it helped others rise. As a girl, I spent most Sundays accompanying my father as he distributed food to those in need. As a young teacher at an elementary school, I learned that the greatest gift a teacher offers is not knowledge itself but the confidence and capabilities it awakens in a child. And, as a mother, I experienced most profoundly that there is no greater joy than nurturing another life.

Gandhi taught us that service to others is among life's highest forms of fulfillment. His ideas have shaped me and my ideas of philanthropy profoundly: *sarvodaya*, his vision of the welfare of all, and *antyyodaya*, his insistence on the uplift of society's most marginalized.

But the highest purpose of philanthropy is to make itself obsolete. To do that, we must turn acts of care and generosity into lasting change by building institutions. Societies shape the future through the institutions they build: universities, hospitals, museums, scientific laboratories, and schools. Every generation has a responsibility to pass on stronger institutions to the next.

Our world is awash in plenty. Yet between 2 billion and 3 billion people, especially in the Global South, remain deprived of nutritious food, adequate housing, clean water and sanitation, quality education and health care, secure livelihoods, and protection from environmental hazards. The primary responsibility for meeting these needs rests with governments, multilateral institutions, and businesses. But social transformation also requires philanthropic institutions capable of combining excellence with compassion, innovation with integrity, and purpose with performance.

Across India, I have encountered incredibly talented and dedicated doctors and nurses; teachers and artists; farmers, athletes, and volunteers. Extraordinary things happen when these talented and dedicated people find opportunity and support. This belief guides my work, as chair of India's Reliance Foundation, on every institution we have built—from excellent schools to a global university still taking shape; from high-quality, affordable, and accessible health care to a cultural center that showcases arts and artists from the world's great cities and India's remotest towns and villages; from an initiative that offers dignity and opportunity to millions of India's skilled craftspeople to an

organization dedicated to protecting and caring for animals.

The most remarkable people I have met rarely ask for aid. What they seek is a chance: a chance to learn, to create, and to contribute. When society provides such opportunities reliably and at scale, lives are transformed. Institutions make this possible. They do more than solve the problems of our today; they prepare humanity for the possibilities of our tomorrow.

BUT BUILDING INSTITUTIONS demands patience. Institutions are gifts to those who inherit them; in time, they might create things their founders never imagined. I often think about the world our children, and their children, will inherit. I hope it will be healthier, kinder, more harmonious, more creative, and more compassionate. I hope it will be a world where

every child has the freedom to dream without limits and the means to pursue those dreams with confidence.

The Sanskrit phrase *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* teaches us that the world is one family. I believe that institution-building is one of the purest expressions of this philosophy: it enlarges the circle of care to embrace humanity as

a whole. And since all nations, communities, and cultures are branches of a single tree, we share a responsibility to tend it together. Philanthropic institutions should forge bonds of mutual learning, exchange, and collaboration; partnerships help multiply the impact of philanthropy.

Ultimately, philanthropy is measured not by the wealth we give away but by the futures we make possible, by the dreams that become reality because someone built something lasting. Time may dim the memory of who builds institutions, but the institutions themselves must shine on.

Ambani is a businesswoman and philanthropist

Children play at a school in Chennai, India, on April 23



Societies shape the future through the institutions they build



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Chesky at an
Airbnb event in San
Francisco in May

THE CEO MOMENT

How Airbnb plans to make cities more affordable

BY SAM JACOBS

NEXT YEAR, AIRBNB WILL MARK ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY. Through its evolution from a few air mattresses on an apartment floor to one of America's best-known tech companies, it's been led by Brian Chesky. And at a time when Silicon Valley doesn't champion introspection, Chesky, 45, is an outlier: someone who has become a prominent voice on company leadership and a frequent investigator of his own character. "The primary weakness of me as a founder running a company was people had to pay for my immaturity in my 30s," he told me during a recent interview at Airbnb's headquarters in San Francisco for our interview series *The CEO Moment*. We spoke as the company, called out by critics as contributing to rising housing costs, was set to announce a number of new housing initiatives.

You are one of three people who started the company in 2007. There aren't many founders leading *Fortune* 500 companies. How do you think the fact that you founded this company shapes how you lead it today? The people that build companies tend to be more in the details, more decisive, bigger authority ... They tend to take bigger, bolder risks partly because they have the moral authority to. For example, I could—I wouldn't, but I could—change the name of the company because I came up with the name of the company. Somebody who is a professional manager, I don't think they would ever dare change the name of their company. They would feel like it's not theirs to change.

'The people that build companies tend to be more in the details.'

—BRIAN CHESKY,
AIRBNB CEO

Now you can get a hotel on Airbnb. Why? I was ideologically against hotels. In fact, I think our first tag line was "Forget hotels." That was my party line for probably 10 years. But we noticed there were three types of people. There are people that only book Airbnbs. There are people that only book hotels. But most people are willing to book both.

You're building your own AI frontier lab separate from Airbnb. Why not build that within Airbnb, and what will be the relationship between the two? I like to think that our shareholders know what they get themselves into, and I never sold them on us being a frontier [AI] company. The benefit to Airbnb and to me is I'm gonna learn a lot about AI, but it's also a totally different kind of culture. So I wanted to keep them separate.

This September, you've announced a number of new initiatives around housing. People say Airbnb makes cities more expensive. What role do you want the company to play in making places more affordable?

We're creating a \$250 million fund to [provide] the last dollar for projects: there's about 750,000 homes in America, development projects, that are stalled because they don't have the last dollar [for] completion ... We want to do something called the City Index. We want to open-source data around cities, policies, the cost of living, permitting—to basically show the cities that are most successful at lowering housing costs ... We want to do a million-dollar prize every year for five years for any company, private or nonprofit, that has ideas around technology that can make housing development easier. These are three things I think we can do in America.

Visit ti.me/ceo-moment to watch the full interview, or follow *The CEO Moment* podcast on Apple or Spotify



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In the Loop By Naomi Nix

SENIOR TECH CORRESPONDENT

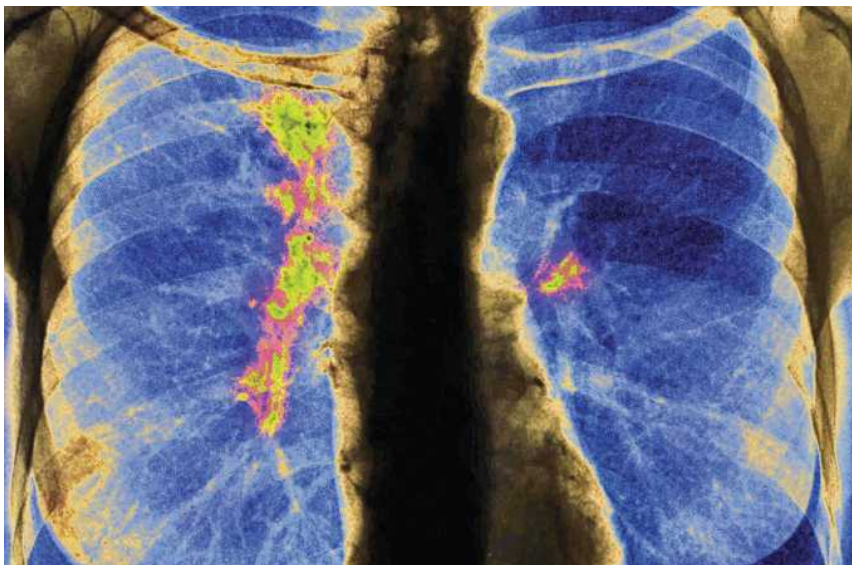
When President Donald Trump posted to Truth Social on Sept. 19 that he would appoint a new AI “czar,” six months after venture capitalist David Sacks stepped down from the role, and that he plans to start an “AI Force” modeled after Space Force, the announcement reportedly surprised people in the tech industry and the White House.

But his comments appeared to acknowledge the mounting political pressure his Administration is facing to beef up safety standards in the AI industry as voters become increasingly anxious about the civilizational impacts of the technology. **Roughly 2 out of 3 Americans told Politico in a recent poll that there is at least a “moderate” risk that advanced AI could destroy humanity**—a perspective shared by people across political parties, genders, and ages. And just 23% of Americans say Trump has handled AI well, compared with 57% who say the opposite, according to a University of Massachusetts Amherst poll. Pressure is also coming from within both Washington and Silicon Valley. Rival AI leaders such as Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman have agreed that slowing AI development is necessary and called on D.C. to coordinate with other governments on safety agreements. And some lawmakers, including Republicans, have proposed bolder regulatory ideas.

But Trump made clear in a follow-up Sept. 21 post that he’s far from inclined to heed the warnings. “This is more of a Hoax,” he wrote on Truth Social, “than even that of RUSSIA, RUSSIA, RUSSIA, UKRAINE, UKRAINE, UKRAINE, UKRAINE, and Climate Change!”



For a twice-weekly deep dive into the AI revolution, sign up at ti.me/InTheLoop



A chest X-ray shows evidence of Stage I lung cancer



Health Matters By Alice Park

SENIOR HEALTH CORRESPONDENT

WHY DO NONSMOKERS GET LUNG cancer? While environmental exposures can explain some cases, researchers found that a sometimes-inherited genetic mutation could explain a dramatically higher risk in others.

In a new study published in *Science*, they report that **people with a certain mutation in the EGFR gene had a 25-fold higher risk of developing lung cancer compared with people without the mutation, regardless of whether they smoked.** Looking only at nonsmokers, the risk was even higher: carriers had a 60-fold higher risk compared with noncarriers.

A handful of genetic mutations, including some that appear to be more prevalent in Asian people, as well as inherited mutations like BRCA2, have already been linked to lung cancer in nonsmokers, but they aren’t well understood. While the specific EGFR mutation in question, called T790M, was first discovered in 2005 in a European family with members who hadn’t smoked but developed lung cancer, it wasn’t clear how much the rare mutation actually contributed to lung cancer.

It took a large dataset of genetic samples from 3.3 million people from the 23andMe Research Institute to

provide some answers, says Dr. Jaclyn LoPiccolo, an attending physician and lung-cancer researcher at Dana Farber Cancer Institute, who co-led the study. The findings open the door to considering how genetic testing might fit into lung-cancer screening for a broader population. Currently, screening—in which people receive a low-dose radiation CT scan—is recommended only for people with a heavy smoking history who are above a certain age.

To see whether genetic screening could help to identify people at higher risk, LoPiccolo is conducting a study that includes people with any inherited genetic risk for lung cancer, including the EGFR T790M mutation. Doctors will work with each participant to understand their family history of lung cancer, smoking history, genetic profile, and any environmental exposures that might contribute to lung cancer before coming up with a personalized plan for how often they should be screened by low-dose radiation for cancer. “The goal is to use CT screening to detect lung cancer at the earliest, most curable stage,” says LoPiccolo.



Stay up to date on the the latest health and wellness news at ti.me/HealthMatters

PSYCHOLOGY

The four key steps to reading a room

BY PAMELA MEYER

EVERY ROOM HAS A PARALLEL CONVERSATION RUNNING beneath the surface—a pulse, a vibe, a temperature. This undercurrent of unspoken behavior delivers data instantly, but only if you can decipher it.

Neuroscientists, psychologists, anthropologists, and linguists have studied how subtle behaviors create meaning. I've spent the past decade training people to spot those signals: who holds power, which relationship will influence a decision, who has already made up their mind, and who may be lying. These are the skills you need to read a room.

FOR AN ACCURATE READ, DECLUTTER YOUR MIND

Your mood influences your judgment. Happy people tend to predict positive outcomes and underestimate risks, whereas research by Australian psychologist Joseph Forgas found that stressed minds can perceive hostility in neutral interactions. Landmark work by J.A. Easterbrook showed that emotion and strain narrow the range of cues we can take in and process.

When your mind is cluttered by a fight with your spouse or an unfinished project, you stop observing what is happening and start seeing others through your own stress. A flat “thanks” becomes a slight; a distracted colleague seems contemptuous. When a room feels like it's turning against you, the first question worth asking is whether the room changed or your bandwidth did.

MANAGE WHAT YOU TRANSMIT

Every gathering has a vibe. That may sound like astrology, but science suggests it is brain circuitry: We catch one another's moods more often than we realize.

Yale neuroscientists led by Joy Hirsch paired strangers face-to-face and used brain imaging to track what transferred when one watched emotionally charged videos and the other watched only that person. The observer began to mirror the viewer's emotional state without ever seeing the videos. A 2023 study in *Communications Biology* found that strangers watching television together synchronized their emotional responses within 850 milliseconds. Synchronization was strongest during positive moments, suggesting joy travels freely while darker feelings are more often concealed.

The emotional state you bring into a room can also shape how everyone else behaves. Manage your own state of mind before you attempt to manage anyone else's.

TAKE NOTE OF WHO IS MISSING

A group's intelligence is not the sum of its members' IQs. Carnegie Mellon professor Anita Williams Woolley found that group performance depended less on average or maximum individual IQ than on collaboration. Strong groups communicate well, stay open-minded, and maintain an equal flow of ideas. A room where one person dominates may feel decisive, but it may be losing intelligence in real time. Notice who commands attention and who recedes. Who gets interrupted? Who is allowed to finish?

READ BODY LANGUAGE LIKE A PRO

Amateurs assign definitive meanings to isolated gestures: crossed arms mean defensiveness; eye contact signals honesty. Pros observe changes from a person's baseline.

Science shows how badly shortcuts

can deceive us. Many people believe liars avoid eye contact. Yet when researchers at an airport asked 338 passengers from 81 countries to tell the truth or lie about their travel plans, the liars held eye contact longer. Honest people, nervous under questioning, sometimes glanced away. Fidgeting is equally meaningless. Someone tapping a foot or play-

ing with a pen may simply be behaving normally. It becomes a signal only when the pattern shifts. The question is never “What does this gesture mean?” The better question is “What does this gesture mean here, from this person, under these conditions?”

Reading a room is part social observation and part emotional intelligence. As you see people and interactions more clearly, you can adjust your behavior accordingly. More doors will open because you will no longer be guessing what the moment requires.

Meyer is the author of *How to Read the Room: The Art and Science of Social Observation*



I've spent the past decade training people to spot these signals



MILITARY

THE WAR HE MUST PREVENT

Admiral Samuel Paparo is tasked with preventing a conflict with China—by preparing for one

By Richard Hall/Hawaii

*Paparo aboard the
U.S.S. Theodore
Roosevelt at
Pearl Harbor on
July 29, 2026*

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP CHEUNG FOR TIME



In the summer of 1986, when he was a college student in Pennsylvania, Samuel Paparo took his future wife Maureen to watch *Top Gun*.

Many young Americans emerged from theaters across the country with a new hero: the brash, daring, risk-taking Maverick, played by Tom Cruise, who became an avatar of American power at the twilight of the Cold War. But Paparo took away a different lesson.

“The hero of the movie is supposed to be Maverick, but the hero of the movie is actually Iceman,” Paparo tells *TIME*, referring to the main character’s rival at the elite Navy pilot-training school. “Maverick’s got all the personal charisma, but Iceman is fastidious, quiet. He’s the hardworking guy that does the right thing, that doesn’t do flashy, dangerous stuff for its own sake.”

Paparo had already passed the Navy’s entrance exams when he went into the theater that day, and joined the next year. His career would precisely mirror the fictional Iceman’s: He attended the Navy Fighter Weapons School, also known as TOPGUN; became a fighter pilot; then a four-star admiral; and eventually commanded the Pacific Fleet. But Paparo would go further, taking the helm of the U.S. Pacific Command, the nation’s oldest and largest geographic combatant command, which covers about half of the earth’s surface.

Few Americans will have heard of Admiral Paparo, and that suits him fine. “If I do my job right, history will never know my name,” he says in his office at the headquarters of the U.S. Pacific Command in Hawaii, on a hill overlooking Pearl Harbor, in late July. But his role places him at an inflection point, as American dominance in the Pacific faces its most serious challenge since World War II.

His command is designed to be the immovable object that blocks the

unstoppable force of China’s expansionist ambitions in the region. And those ambitions have been stated clearly: Beijing has vowed to bring Taiwan, the self-ruling island that has been politically separate from the mainland since China’s civil war ended in 1949, under its control—by force if necessary. China’s President Xi Jinping has described unification as “a historical inevitability.”

Paparo’s job, in its simplest terms, is the projection of American power. His most important mission is to deter a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, an event that would challenge the very foundations of a global system underpinned by American hegemony. That the outlines of this mission stay the same regardless of which party or President is in the White House speaks to the importance of his role. The force Paparo builds and the plans he puts in place last for decades, and could determine to whom the next century belongs.

The public face of American military power is, of course, the Commander in Chief. The public voice emanates from the Oval Office and the podium in the White House press briefing room. But behind that power sits commanders like Paparo, overseeing the often hidden and awesome infrastructure that backs up that public face and voice—his command oversees some 400,000 military and civilian personnel, a Pacific Fleet of some 200 ships, including five aircraft carrier strike groups, and more than 1,000 aircraft. He marshals that power in distant oceans, islands, and military bases that most Americans will never see or even think about.

When President Donald Trump met in late September with China’s Xi for their third face-to-face summit since

he returned to office, the cameras were trained on the White House; reporters parsed each utterance by the two leaders to divine whether the two powers are heading toward cooperation or conflict. It is Paparo’s job to ensure that whatever happens when the leaders talk, U.S. power remains pre-eminent—and that if somehow in the future conflict breaks out, it comes out on top. He must hold to that approach even as wars elsewhere consume the munitions and resources he may need, and upheaval at the Pentagon raises the stakes of pushing back.

“I’m almost quoting Sun Tzu when I say winning without fighting is the acme of skill,” he says, referencing the Chinese military strategist who wrote *The Art of War*. “Mission success for me is not to fight and win a war; it’s to provide a deterrent capability so that we never go to war in the first place.”

Paparo, 61, speaks deliberately and in a low voice, smiling often. But when conversation turns serious, so does his expression—his brows become furrowed, and he stares into the middle distance to summon his words. “We don’t seek to become great wartime leaders,” he says. “We seek to be great peacetime deterrents.”

WHAT IF DETERRENCE doesn’t work? The U.S. emerged from World War II with its dominance of the Pacific unquestioned, but that may now be changing. Over the past few decades, as China has transformed into the world’s second largest economy, it has been engaged in a historic military buildup. China’s defense spending has increased 13-fold over the past three decades, and it now spends more on



Paparo, front row, at a gathering of military leaders in Quantico, Va., on Sept. 30, 2025

defense than the next 22 Indo-Pacific countries combined, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a bipartisan Washington, D.C.-based think tank. It has made rapid technological advances in artificial intelligence and fielded several generations of fighter jets. Its navy has grown from a coastal force into something capable of projecting global power, and by hull count it is now the largest in the world.

Brian Hart, deputy director of the China Power Project at CSIS, describes it as a “comprehensive, across-the-board modernization effort,” one that has changed the calculus for every power in the Pacific. The People’s Liberation Army, he tells *TIME*, has “significantly transformed the balance of power.”

Paparo need only look out his office window at the turquoise waters of Pearl Harbor to be reminded of the last time U.S. supremacy in the Pacific was truly tested. He describes China’s buildup as “historic” and “an exponential increase in military power, and more specifically, in power-projection capability.”

“Twenty-five years ago the People’s Liberation Army Navy was about 37 warships, and today it’s 12 times that,” he says. “Just in the last 18 months they’ve delivered two cruisers, eight destroyers, eight frigates, an aircraft carrier, 11 submarines, four amphibious ships, and four long-range combat logistics ships.” He is particularly concerned by China’s advances in space and missile development and the rapid expansion of its nuclear arsenal. “They’re moving toward world reach,” he says.

For all of its global ambitions, much of China’s military development has been pursued with one target in mind. U.S. intelligence assesses that China’s Xi has ordered his military to be capable of seizing Taiwan by force by 2027, the centenary of the People’s Liberation Army. The intelligence community’s annual threat assessment, released in March, suggests no invasion

is currently planned for next year, but by then, the pieces Xi needs to do so will likely be in place.

If there appears to be a path to capturing Taiwan without using force, Xi insists he would prefer to take it. Presidential elections in Taiwan in January 2028 may provide some clarity in that regard: China’s old rival, the Kuomintang, is increasingly amenable to negotiations with Beijing. If the political party wins in 2028, the likelihood of an invasion may decrease. If Taiwan’s President Lai Ching-te, a fierce opponent of China’s sovereignty claims, wins reelection, Hart says, “Beijing could significantly ramp up pressure on Taiwan.”

Paparo’s job is to convince Xi that the costs of military action will be too much to bear, regardless of what is happening politically on the island. By act of Congress, the U.S. is obliged to sell Taiwan the weapons it needs for its own defense; while it does not require the U.S. to defend the island directly, the commitment could go further to include direct conflict with China. He describes his mission as a delicate balancing act

between ensuring that his counterparts know American capabilities well enough to understand the risks of engaging, and protecting its necessary secrets and strategy. “It’s demonstrating credible combat power, demonstrating capability and will, but keeping the crown jewels of the nation that are going to deliver combat success opaque to your counterparts, so that they can’t build a counter for it,” he says.

Paparo describes the strategy as deterrence by denial. “It’s a way of expressing that we’re not seeking the overthrow of the Communist Party,” he says. “It’s just that you should know that where America’s direct vital interests are involved, there’s a high probability of denying your aggression.”

This theory of deterrence operates on a grand, geopolitical scale, and in much smaller interactions. Paparo recounts a confrontation with a Chinese counterpart over what he describes as an “unsafe” encounter in June 2023 during a transit of the Taiwan Strait in which a Chinese Luyang destroyer cut across the bow of an American ship.

In the ensuing back-and-forth, Paparo told his counterpart that he had been in command at the watch center for the engagement and had video showing that their version of events was not true. He offered to share it, then let the matter rest.

“I’m not going to impugn his own character in it. He’s representing his country. He’s in uniform, and you know, if we do have a fight, him and I might have to shake hands at the end and agree to go to our separate sides,” he says.

In that moment, Paparo chose a diplomatic approach. He does, however, have a more direct plan to deter a Chinese attack on Taiwan. It is based on a term he uses to describe the environment Chinese forces would walk into if they took military action: “Hellscape.”

The strategy has been partly inspired by Ukraine’s defense against Russian invasion, and its ability to halt Moscow’s advances by turning the front lines of that conflict into a no-man’s-land patrolled by killer drones. Paparo would aim to saturate the Taiwan Strait with cheap, mass-produced precision drones, along with more conventional high-tech missile power, to deny China the ability

to land an amphibious assault, or at least significantly delay it.

“We’ve seen that assault warfare, whether that is an amphibious assault, an airborne assault, has become a much more costly human endeavor,” he says. “In the ways that Ukraine is about a 600-mile-by-30-mile hellscape of drone warfare, I seek to put those principles at work to deter an armed invasion.”

He continues: “Putting 21st century technological change to work for the United States of America is what that’s about. We need not gain air or maritime superiority of a space; we need only deny its use to aggressors.”

Direct American involvement in a conflict over Taiwan is by no means assured. Paparo is tasked with building a force to confront China, but the President will decide how to respond. “The highest ideals of American civil-military relations are such that policy is king,” he says.

Who would win that conflict is something that is fiercely debated. A 2023 CSIS war game found that the U.S. and its allies defeated a Chinese amphibious invasion of Taiwan in most scenarios, but the costs to the U.S. were substantial: two aircraft carriers, dozens of ships, and hundreds of aircraft, the heaviest American losses since World War II. Those war games were run before the war in Iran depleted U.S. missile stocks.

“I am confident in our ability to prevail,” Paparo says. “What I am working toward is the margin by which we do, and that margin expresses itself in lives, capability, money, and time. I want to drive that bill down to zero.”

AN ENORMOUS MAP of the Indo-Pacific theater lines the wall of Paparo’s office. His desk overlooks a large room adorned with historical Pacific artifacts and gifts given to the admiral and his predecessors: a five-star flag that belonged to General Douglas MacArthur; a barometer gifted to Admiral Harry Harris Jr., who led the command from 2015 to 2018, by China’s Ministry of National Defense. Closer to his desk is a large computer screen showing the positions of every vessel under his command. As he toggles through the ships on the screen to demonstrate the scale of his fleet, he pauses somewhere near



the Indian Ocean to press home a point: His command is not merely preparing for war; it is fighting one. “The Iranian frigate was sunk by us,” he says. He is referring to an incident in March, when the U.S.S. *Charlotte* submarine torpedoed and sank the Iranian navy frigate *IRIS Dena* in the Indian Ocean as it was returning to Iran from India, where it had taken part in an international exercise. More than 100 Iranian sailors were killed. Paparo’s forces have also helped enforce a blockade of Iran’s coastline and support logistics for the war.

That the U.S. Pacific Command is fighting one war on one side of the world while preparing for another 6,000 miles away in the Taiwan Strait is a measure of its scale. As he stands in front of his map, Paparo sweeps his arm down the Western seaboard, along the coast to Southern California, and across the central Pacific, pointing out an array of U.S. territories and possessions. These places may seem like distant lands to



◀ Taiwanese troops set antitank barriers on Tamkang Bridge during drills on Aug. 6, 2026

many Americans. To Paparo, they are as much a part of the U.S. as New York or California. To see the Pacific in this way is to understand the meaning behind this projection of power: it's not just for the protection of an important strategic partner in Taiwan; it is for the protection of the U.S. itself. "There's no more Pacific a country in the world than the United States of America," he says.

It's not just about Taiwan and China, either. The North Koreans, he says, "are seeking a nuclear deterrent" and want to present the world with a "fait accompli." The Russians "have increased their air, missile, and maritime capabilities."

Much of the job is managing friends rather than enemies. The Pentagon has called on Paparo to mediate between allies at odds with one another, and he says there is nothing new in that. Those military-to-military relationships, he adds, "tend to be an anchor that attenuates the ups and downs of policy disagreements among political

leaders ... but it always respects the national policy of our civilian leadership."

Few conflicts in the world today do not brush up against the Indo-Pacific theater or impact it in some way. The Iran war and U.S. support for Ukraine have placed severe strain on the resources available to all commands, causing a depletion in the stockpiles for missile defense like the Patriot and THAAD systems, and in long-range ground attack missiles, according to the Pentagon and CSIS estimates.

In May, a planned \$14 billion arms package for Taiwan was put under review in part to preserve munitions for the Iran war. Experts have warned it may take years to replenish those stocks, a timeline that could affect the calculus of China and Russia.

Those shortages are no secret, but it's a perilous time to be out of step with the White House and the Pentagon. At least 20 top military leaders, including generals and admirals, have been fired or left

their positions since Pete Hegseth became Secretary of Defense at the start of the second Trump Administration. The turmoil culminated in the late August resignation of Army Secretary Dan Driscoll, who reportedly left his role after clashing with Hegseth over the firings of senior generals and the Secretary's alleged stymieing of Army modernization efforts in the midst of a U.S. war against Iran.

Hegseth has characterized those departures as part of a campaign to undo what he saw as the promotion of "woke" leadership. In a speech in September 2025 in Quantico, Va., to the military's generals and admirals, all of whom were required to attend, Hegseth criticized the promotion of leaders for what he described as "the wrong reasons, based on their race, based on gender quotas, based on historic so-called firsts." Paparo was visible in the front row of that gathering, his expression giving nothing away.

He has been careful in his public remarks about the impact the war in Iran has had on the readiness of his command. When questioned in the Senate about how prolonged conflict could impinge on his mission, Paparo conceded only that "there are finite limits to the magazine, and I have all the faith in the world that they're being employed judiciously."

In private, he appears to have been more candid. Paparo's name emerged recently in a *Washington Post* report on a classified assessment, along with other combatant commanders, in which he is said to have objected to the continued use of an aircraft carrier strike group and destroyers for the war in Iran. He was also named in a *New York Times* report as one of several "private interlocutors" who had been offering "unvarnished" views of the Iran war to Vice President JD Vance. Vance's team declined to comment on the report.

Ward Carroll, a Navy veteran who flew in F-14s and a friend of Paparo's for many years, says the admiral's circumspection is part of his character. "He doesn't want headlines," he says. "He's not out there like some other folks have



Paparo speaks to sailors aboard the U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt at Pearl Harbor

been, saying Epic Fury was a huge mistake. He may say it in private ... but he's certainly not going to say it to the media or allow it to be leaked." Paparo excels, Carroll says, by choosing not to "wade into the food fight that is modern-day media and politics at all." A spokesperson for Pacific Command declined to comment on Paparo's private conversations about the Iran war.

When TIME asks Paparo about the potential impact of Ukraine and Iran, he is again cautious, pivoting to the lessons the U.S. is learning from both: namely the rapid deployment of drones in Ukraine and of AI-enabled operations in Iran, which were used to select and recommend targets for the U.S. military.

"The nature of an operation in the Pacific would be to counter an amphibious invasion. Well, we've just not used a lot of antiship weapons—we still maintain robust inventories of those," he says. "And so, while I'm not going to whistle past the problem of the expenditure of munitions, it is our job to charge into the learning, and for us to get better."

IF THERE IS a permanence to America's projection of power in the Pacific, it can also be found in Paparo's own family.

His father Samuel Paparo Sr. who died in February, served four years in the Marine Corps before becoming a shipworker at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard. There he helped refit the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Kitty Hawk* and repair the U.S.S. *John F. Kennedy*. The younger Paparo would later fly from both. "He was really proud of that," he says of his father. His grandfather was a Seabee, serving in one of the Navy's construction battalions across the Pacific during World War II, in Bora Bora, Guam, and other islands. He died when Paparo was 13, but he left behind an old wooden scrapbook he had built with pictures from the war and all the places he had been. A young Paparo would pick it up from time to time and leaf through it. "I don't think he imagined his grandson to be here in command," he says.

His mother washed hair in a South Philadelphia barbershop and later worked a makeup counter in a department store. "Neither my father nor his father finished high school. In fact,

nobody in my family before me had ever had a university education," he says. He would later attend Villanova, the Catholic college also attended by the first American Pontiff, Pope Leo XIV. "We make Popes and admirals," he says of his alma mater.

He joined TOPGUN, whose exacting culture left a lasting impression. "What the school confers is attention to detail, dedication to execution, dedication to getting better, and being introspective and running to your own problems, of seeking the perfect flight that you'll never get," he adds. He flew F-14, F-15, and F/A-18 jets, and clocked more than 6,000 flight hours and 1,100 carrier landings. He says he initially aimed to serve as long as his father. "Serving for four years was intentional, and serving for 40 was a blessing," he adds.

Paparo's time leading the Pacific Command is historic not just for the opponent he faces, but also because it coincides with a rapid and dramatic change in the nature of warfare. On one wall of his office hangs a reprint of a TIME cover from May 18, 1942, depicting Admiral Chester Nimitz, the naval commander who led the U.S. to victory over Japan at sea in the Pacific war. Nimitz took command of the Pacific Fleet in December 1941, also at a time of great technological change.

After Pearl Harbor, and under Nimitz's watch, the battleship would be eclipsed by the aircraft carrier. Amphibious warfare would be revolutionized and directed under a single commander. And then there was the kamikaze—organized suicide attacks by aircraft flown by Japanese pilots—and their foreshadowing of the questions posed by the advancement of unmanned aerial drones in warfare today. "He adapted to change, including the unknown," Paparo says of Nimitz. "That's the greatest leadership model I can think of."

Paparo hopes that he never has to fight the war he has spent so long preparing for, that his plans go untested and passed on to the next commander. In the meantime, he will continue with the quiet work. "Mine is not a heroic story," he says. "Heroism is service that happens at the unforgiving hour. The best service prevents the unforgiving hour." □

TIME100/AI

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Pariah State

Myanmar is poorer and more violent since its dictator seized power. Now he wants rapprochement with the West

By Charlie Campbell/Naypyidaw

FIRST CAME THE MIRROR. BEFORE MIN AUNG HLAING enters the room for his first Western media interview since seizing power in a 2021 coup d'état, aides maneuver an ornate Rococo-revival looking glass into place for preening. Then come requests for his portrait: light him from the left, the better to disguise a thinning hairline no longer hidden beneath an olive cap.

Myanmar's former commander in chief now calls himself President, following January elections widely condemned as fraudulent. His fitful transformation from generalissimo to civilian statesman extends even to awkward attempts at bonhomie. He confesses to loving golf—he plays off an 18 handicap—though a bad back has lately kept him from the fairway.

Yet the makeover has limits. The geniality fades when questions turn to human rights, narcotics trafficking, or sanctioned relatives. Even his birthplace remains classified. “I used to revisit my township very often, so if you can carefully watch the news, you can figure out where I’m native,” he says cryptically.

Min Aung Hlaing may have swapped his uniform for a silken longyi sarong, but the barracks instinct to conceal, deflect, and command remains firmly in place. “Some of my responses didn’t directly touch upon your questions, but I hope they were still useful,” he offers after our hour together.

Obfuscation is a curious tactic for someone fixated on ingratiating himself with the international community. While his coup was widely condemned, Min Aung Hlaing has now ruled Myanmar for five years, and there is a growing realization that he is going nowhere. He has now been welcomed on official visits to nine nations, and while autocracies like Russia and China might warrant an eye roll, trips to broadly democratic Thailand and India indicate a wider thaw.

For neighbors, engagement is born of necessity: Myanmar

is not only the world’s top producer of methamphetamine and opium, but also the nerve center of a global “scamdemic” that loots unsuspecting bank accounts to the tune of \$15 billion annually. “The situation in Myanmar is having a global impact,” says Jeremy Douglas, deputy director of operations at the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime. “It’s off the charts, and the region needs to intervene before it gets worse.”

The quandary facing Western powers is whether to follow suit. Myanmar is also among the world’s most resource-rich nations, boasting vast deposits of jade, copper, coal, teak, gemstones, tin, and gold. And it is the world’s third largest producer of heavy rare earths—arcane materials over which Washington and Beijing continue to spar.

Yet the reputational stakes of cozying up to Min Aung Hlaing may eclipse these riches. The Southeast Asian nation of 55 million, formerly known as Burma, remains racked by civil war between forces loyal to his government, ethnic rebel groups, and a National Unity Government (NUG) spawned from the ousted administration of democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains in detention. Today, Min Aung Hlaing controls less than half of Myanmar’s total landmass.

“Our strategy has been expanding our territory and providing necessary social welfare and essential services,” says Duwa Lashi La, acting President of the NUG. “We also protect the public from the junta’s attacks.”

The conflict has so far claimed more than 100,000 lives, displaced 3.6 million people, and sent countless others fleeing across Myanmar’s borders. Troops under Min Aung Hlaing’s command stand accused of torching villages, massacring civilians, and committing sexual violence, while fighter aircraft and drones have targeted schools and temples. U.N. investigators have accused him of genocide, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing. He denies wrongdoing.





While the Biden Administration rhetorically backed the NUG, U.S. President Donald Trump has anchored foreign policy in transactional interests. On June 25, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Michael DeSombre noted that Washington is “very open to working with all stakeholders” to combat “mass displacement and transnational crime.” Last year, the Trump Administration withdrew sanctions on several junta allies amid a Myanmar policy review that looks likely to advocate revived ties. It has already ended temporary protected status for nearly 4,000 refugees. “It is safe for Burmese citizens to return home,” then Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said in November.

Fulsome engagement will “infuriate a large portion of the Myanmar population,” says Scot Marciel, U.S. ambassador to Myanmar from 2016 to 2020. “But I don’t think Trump and company care.”

As ever, a key driver is countering the growing clout of China, which covets Myanmar’s resources as well as strategic access to the Bay of Bengal. But Beijing’s approach has been scattergun: it considers Suu Kyi an “old friend,” yet has supplied rebel forces as well as backing Min Aung Hlaing—a diplomatic fudge critics say underscores the perils of replacing a values-based U.S. approach with a transactional, Chinese-led regional order.

“It’s hard to ascribe a clear strategy for China in Myanmar,” says Drew Thompson, a former U.S. defense official now at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore. “It’s contributed to instability by not creating a preponderance of power in any one place.”

The gamble is whether engagement could tease Myanmar from China’s orbit and achieve more than years of condemnation has. Sanctions, the argument goes, have not prevented foreign firms from operating in the country, nor would they block U.S. companies from re-entering. Under this realpolitik, Washington’s demands would be concrete: lower

tariffs on American goods, curb scam networks targeting Americans, and deny China access to critical infrastructure. Political reform, meanwhile, would be back-burnered.

A revised Myanmar policy is far from a priority for the U.S. “There would have to be some tangible economic benefit to really bother,” says Marciel. Min Aung Hlaing has enlisted influential people to make that case; lobbyist Roger Stone—a Trump confidant—is being paid \$50,000 a month to help “rebuild” relations with D.C., according to official filings.

“I’d be very surprised if the U.S. doesn’t re-engage with the junta,” says Jonah Blank, a Southeast Asia analyst and former Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffer. “None of the things that held back previous administrations, like human rights or democracy promotion, mean a thing.”

Yet engagement would also erase much of America’s moral authority in the region. Min Aung Hlaing isn’t shy in his hope that America First nativism offers him a lifeline: “It would be ideal if the U.S. could cooperate with us in fostering the peace, stability, and development essential for our people to successfully realize a fully democratic state.”

The last phrase hangs awkwardly here in the capital Naypyidaw, a labyrinthine citadel built by the military in 2005 to insulate itself from unrest. “There are various forms of democracy,” Min Aung Hlaing says with a thin smile. “There is American democracy, there is European democracy. I will ensure that Myanmar achieves a democratic system that truly aligns with our own culture, customs, and traditions.”

THOSE TRADITIONS ARE on full display a short drive from Min Aung Hlaing’s office, where Myanmar’s Defense Services Museum sprawls across 600 manicured acres. Buses of schoolchildren streaked with golden *thanaka* paste—a traditional sunscreen and beauty adornment—clamber over decommissioned fighter jets, tanks, and anti-aircraft guns.

The Myanmar military’s suffocating political role calcified

▼
DEVOTEES
PRAY AND MAKE
OFFERINGS AT
THE SHWEDAGON
PAGODA IN YANGON



▼
POTENTIAL
BUYERS AND
SELLERS AT THE
JADE MARKET
IN MANDALAY



after General Ne Win staged a coup in 1962. Min Aung Hlaing was 5 at the time, growing up in the northern city of Mandalay. He says he wasn't always keen to attend school, "but my mother made absolutely sure that I did." This inculcated a love of literature, he says, but after attending university in Yangon, he abandoned his law studies to pursue a military career, gaining admission to the elite Defence Services Academy on his third attempt in 1974.

Min Aung Hlaing's formative environment was Ne Win's military machine—an institution that regarded itself as sole guardian of unity, sovereignty, and political order. "The military is an integral part of the nation," he says, "and military personnel and their families are a part of the people."

Former classmates recall an average cadet of below-average charm—a reserved, disciplined, and politically cautious officer who accumulated influence through institutional loyalty, bureaucratic persistence, and the careful management of military elites. His profile rose in 2009 when he led a campaign to subdue ethnic insurgents in the Kokang region along the Chinese border. The offensive ended a two-decade cease-fire and sent some 30,000 people fleeing into China. While the episode angered Beijing, it burnished Min Aung Hlaing's leadership credentials and spurred successive promotions.

It was a strange moment in Myanmar. The old junta run by another military dictator, Senior General Than Shwe, was nominally stepping back, easing censorship, and releasing political prisoners, including Suu Kyi, who eventually assumed executive power as state counselor. Min Aung Hlaing presented himself as a professional soldier supporting a carefully managed transition. He cultivated

foreign military relationships, met diplomats, and posed with monks. The once taciturn officer increasingly behaved like a politician.

When Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide in 2015, President Barack Obama lifted all remaining U.S. economic sanctions. The country Suu Kyi inherited had been hollowed out by half a century of dysfunction. Southeast Asia's richest economy upon independence in 1948, Myanmar had become by some metrics its poorest—its banks insolvent, bureaucracy broken, and corruption endemic. Suu Kyi tapped Australian economist Sean Turnell to help reverse that decline. Reforms curbed inflation and deficits, opened the country to investment, and expanded microfinance to 6 million borrowers, overwhelmingly women.

Yet civilian control was a mirage: the 2008 constitution guaranteed a quarter of legislative seats for the military, which also nominated the ministers of defense, home affairs, and border affairs. Reform unfolded inside a constitutional cage. Civilian leaders could redirect spending toward schools and hospitals, but they could not restrain the generals, overcome weak institutions, or decentralize power. "There was still a military mindset that Burma is a victim, and the perpetrators are always invidious foreigners," says Turnell. "The international economy was an arena of threat rather than opportunity."

A nadir was reached in 2016 with military operations that the U.S. subsequently deemed genocide against the Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim minority concentrated in Rakhine state. Myanmar denies the Rohingya constitute an Indigenous ethnic group, commonly referring to them as "Bengalis" and portraying them as interlopers from Bangladesh.

'Their behavior
will not change.'

—SCOT MARCIEL,
U.S. AMBASSADOR
TO MYANMAR, 2016 TO 2020

Attacks on security posts by Rohingya militants the next year prompted counterterrorism “clearance operations” that saw hundreds of villages burned amid accusations of mass executions and rape. More than 700,000 fled across the Bangladeshi border, while a U.N. fact-finding mission conservatively estimates up to 10,000 were killed. An International Criminal Court prosecutor sought Min Aung Hlaing’s arrest for crimes against humanity, while a separate Argentine warrant also accuses him of genocide. “We have not committed any such acts against the Bengalis in Rakhine state,” he says. “Our actions were strictly limited to safeguarding our country’s sovereignty. Our conscience is entirely clear.”

Min Aung Hlaing had an incongruous ally in Nobel laureate Suu Kyi, who took the remarkable step of defending Myanmar’s military at the Hague, where she urged the bench to “bear in mind this complex situation and the challenge to sovereignty and security.” The international community was aghast and stripped her of numerous honors. “She was desperately trying not to rock the boat,” says Mon Mon Myat, a former democracy activist and Suu Kyi biographer.

Yet Suu Kyi’s performance also angered Myanmar’s top brass, who deemed her defense lukewarm after she raised the possibility of courts-martial for military transgressors. “It was the wrong strategy,” says Aung Zaw, a former student activist and founder of the Thailand-based magazine *The Irrawaddy*. “She was seen as defending the regime at the Hague, but then the military also weren’t happy.”

That animosity exploded in November 2020 when the NLD won another landslide. While the Carter Center rated the process “very good” or “reasonable” at 95% of observed polling stations, Min Aung Hlaing alleges rampant fraud, calling it “one of the most disgraceful elections in democratic history.”

On Feb. 1, 2021, a convoy of black military vehicles rolled through Naypyidaw to detain top NLD leaders. Suu Kyi was sentenced to 33 years (now reduced to 18) on charges ranging from corruption to illegally possessing walkie-talkies. “I have been extremely lenient toward her,” Min Aung Hlaing says with a straight face. “We made every possible effort to prevent the situation from reaching this point.”

“It would be ideal if the U.S. could cooperate with us in fostering peace.”

WHAT REALLY DROVE Min Aung Hlaing to seize power dominated discussions among officials in squalid detention. “We talked about it a lot,” says Turnell, who spent 650 days in custody. “There was certainly a part of the military that didn’t want any loosening of the sort under way.”

The coup is best understood as a reaction to a regime losing control. According to a leaked 2004 military dossier, the junta engineered reforms to hedge against Beijing’s overbearing influence and leverage Suu Kyi’s freedom to win Western trade, aid, and diplomatic legitimacy. But the generals miscalculated the public’s fierce devotion to “The Lady,” whose popularity proved fundamentally incompatible with the military’s absolute power. Myanmar’s military also has

sprawling business interests spanning banking, mining, gems, construction, manufacturing, tobacco, tourism, transport, telecoms, and real estate. Reforms threatened this gravy train.

It is also true that Min Aung Hlaing was facing mandatory retirement when he seized power in 2021. One regional envoy also pointed to how Trump had normalized complaints of voter fraud amid his own election defeat just five days before Myanmar’s ballot. Moreover, Thailand’s generals had staged a coup seven years earlier which, after a period of protests and civil disruption, had been begrudgingly tolerated.

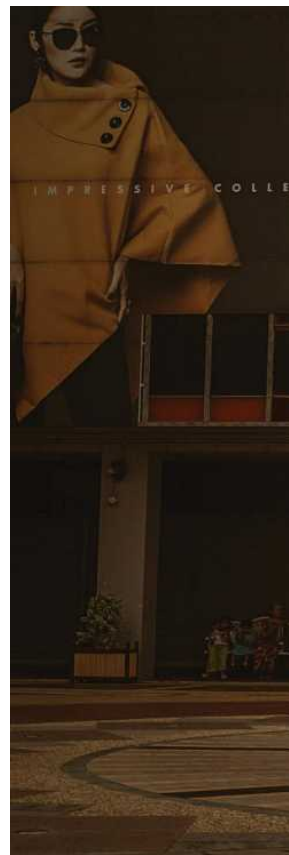
But in Myanmar, a defiant Gen Z refused to submit. Millions joined nationwide general strikes, doctors and teachers walked off the job, and young citizens formed the People’s Defense Forces (PDF), bringing armed resistance from rural borderlands into urban strongholds. The military responded with summary executions, mass arrests, and airstrikes. By late 2023, three ethnic armed groups launched Operation 1027 in the country’s northeast, overrunning more than 200 military outposts. Analysts openly predicted the regime’s collapse, and rumors of an internal military revolt circulated.

Min Aung Hlaing responded with ruthless efficiency. He purged disgruntled brass hats, imposed forced conscription for young adults, and implemented a devastating “four cuts” strategy—severing resistance forces from food, funding, intelligence, and recruits, by burning villages and leveling contested zones. Volker Türk, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, warned such collective punishment “may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.”

Yet Min Aung Hlaing’s ultimate salvation came from Beijing, which was initially angered by his power grab and refused early requests to meet President Xi Jinping. To save face, Min Aung Hlaing instead flew to Moscow. “Whenever we have faced crises due to our political situations, Russia has consistently supported us,” he says.

But Asia’s superpower wasn’t going to be embarrassed by an upstart tyrant on its impoverished periphery, especially when junta-connected scammers were brazenly fleecing millions of Chinese citizens. So Beijing began arming the rebels.

A panicked Min Aung Hlaing pivoted to full cooperation with China, handing over the scam bigwigs as well as tens of thousands of lowly fraudsters. In response, Beijing has entered a cautious détente, welcoming Min Aung Hlaing to Beijing, strong-arming rebels into cease-fires, and supplying military



—MIN AUNG HLAING



hardware—all on the strict condition that he safeguard Chinese economic assets and rein in criminal syndicates.

“We have achieved a certain degree of success [tackling] challenges regarding peace and stability in the ethnic border regions,” says Min Aung Hlaing. “Though some matters are still being negotiated.”

MYANMAR’S LOPSIDED RELIANCE on China glitters in plain sight at Mandalay’s jade market. Each morning, heavily tattooed Burmese traders lay conflict-zone stones across folding tables for Chinese merchants to probe with flashlights. Once cut and polished, the jade is sold to buyers across greater China, often via TikTok and RedNote.

Mei Mei, who arrived here from Yunnan province three years ago, says she earns \$150,000 annually trading jade online. Yet war has crushed supply routes and trade has plummeted. “Chinese people don’t have much money,” she says. “And the fighting makes it difficult to transport jade here.”

It’s not just Chinese traders feeling the pinch, with total cross-border trade plunging by around half since the coup. That decline stokes frustration not only with the government but also the NUG, amid growing fatalism toward the prospect of meaningful change. “The PDF are gangsters,” says one dad of two in Mandalay. “Now we must pay money to both the government and rebels. They should stop fighting. Democracy is best, but stability is better than war.”

Yet it’s a conflict that will keep rumbling on. Despite losing Chinese backing, the NUG controls enough territory to fund itself indefinitely via taxation and resource extraction. The harder it fights, the tighter Min Aung Hlaing turns the screw on ordinary people. TIME met one 5-year-old girl sleeping rough by a roadside near Mandalay after her father was forcibly

conscripted. The well-heeled of Yangon, meanwhile, pay monthly levies to dodge the draft, filling officials’ pockets.

But across this social chasm the great unifier is animus toward Min Aung Hlaing; a mere mention of his name will elicit a sneer, headshake, or crimson jet of betel spit. Outside the country, people are more explicit. “He’s a clown,” says Mon Mon Myat, the biographer. He’s the “worst of all Myanmar’s military dictators,” says U Gambira, a prominent monk and activist. “People are disgusted by him,” says Aung Zaw, the journalist.

Unlike authoritarian regimes in China or Vietnam, Myanmar’s military offers no compelling economic vision. Min Aung Hlaing speaks vaguely about “transitioning from basic raw-material production to manufacturing finished goods.” But since his coup, GDP has shrunk 13%, poverty has almost doubled, the kyat currency is 60% weaker, foreign direct investment is down 90%, while inflation averages 20%. “There’s no development focus, which really sets them apart,” says Turnell. “There’s just no vision for the economy except as a vehicle for control.”

▲
A LOCAL FAMILY
VISITS A SHOPPING
MALL IN MANDALAY

Min Aung Hlaing is pitching sanctions relief as a win-win, dangling carrots to coax the international community back to the table. An earlier bilateral agreement to repatriate the Rohingya is dependent on rolling back legal challenges, he says. Otherwise, “it becomes an impossible situation for us to resolve.” A potential amnesty for Suu Kyi “depends on her,” he says, though suggested that could change if “grounds for reconsideration emerge on our part.”

Beneath these overtures lies an enduring paranoia regarding Chinese domination, reviving the same impulse that drove Myanmar’s last, abortive attempt at rapprochement with the West. Though Min Aung Hlaing also stands to benefit personally from any loosening; he and his children have been targeted by the Treasury Department for their business dealings. “I urge the U.S. government to review [sanctions] objectively,” he says.

Such demands would be dead on arrival in an era governed by values-based foreign policy. Today, they may find a market. “The key thing to understand is, whether you engage with the military or not, their behavior will not change,” says Marciel. “That said, isolation has limited value as well.”

As global powers weigh strategic leverage against democratic ideals, Myanmar’s people remain trapped in a grim deadlock—a despot that cannot conquer, a resistance that cannot win, and foreign capitals reluctant to tilt the scales. The tragedy of Myanmar is not just that it burns, but that every player can feed the flames, while none can build a nation from the ashes. □



EDUCATION

TEACHERS' TEACHER

Louisa Moats' reading program is painstaking, pricey, and decades old. It's also the hot new thing

BY BELINDA LUSCOMBE/FAIRLEE, VT.

LOUISA MOATS WAS AT A CONFERENCE IN Daphne, Ala., earlier this year when she was approached by a group of teachers. For the 81-year-old, this was a relatively new occurrence. "They're poorly paid, they don't look very healthy, they certainly didn't have an elite education and I feel this concern and admiration for them as they do this job," she says, with her characteristic frankness. "They come up to me, with this glazed, starry-eyed look, and thank me as if I, personally, was the conduit to their renewed sense of purpose and competence. I get that a lot now."

Moats has become a late-in-life heroine, at least in some circles, because of a teacher-training program she wrote decades ago that has become a buzzy property. She is not exactly basking in the attention. "I take it with a grain of salt," she says, sitting in her remote Vermont lake house. "Behind that is my sense that what I would want them to do is probably not exactly what's going on in their classroom, but it's a reasonable enough approximation that it's making a difference for kids."

Her skepticism can be forgiven. For a long time, Moats found herself on the losing side of America's so-called reading wars, the back-and-forth over the best way to teach kids to read. She and her cohort of researchers promote the idea that reading is a skill that must be painstakingly taught, first through an understanding of the way

sounds make up speech and get represented as letters, then through explicit instruction on how language works. But the prevailing view, until a few years ago, was that most children would figure out how to decode the letters if given enough encouragement, stimulating material, and context clues, just as they do with speech.

"This is still something I ponder all the time," Moats says, about why schools chose to teach the way they did. One explanation she has landed on: people did not keep up with the research. "Usually they have not sat down and looked at the evidence—the nature of the evidence, the scope of the evidence, the durability of the evidence—and so they don't understand what the science is about."

Interest in "the science" has recently increased dramatically, alongside the level of panic about literacy rates in the U.S. About 4 in 10 American children have not mastered basic reading-comprehension skills by fourth grade, the worst result in 20 years, according to the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). A third of eighth-graders also fall below the reading level expected for their age. The average 12th-grader scores three points lower on a reading test than his or her peers did in 2019, and 10 points lower than those from 1992.

Some of that can be laid at the door of school closures during the pandemic. But it's a problem

ABOUT 700,000
TEACHERS HAVE
ENROLLED IN
THE INTENSIVE
READING COURSE
WRITTEN BY MOATS.
PICTURED OUTSIDE
HER HOME IN
RURAL VERMONT

Photograph
by John Tully
for TIME

with deeper roots: roughly a quarter of young adults (16 to 24) are functionally illiterate, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Time-use surveys report that people from 20 to 34 spend no more than 10 minutes a day reading for pleasure. Grave declarations have proclaimed the “end of reading.”

To combat the decline, states have looked to the few education districts where students are showing improvement and followed their example by enacting what are known as science-of-reading laws. The laws, which have been passed in 42 states and D.C., mostly in the past seven years, mandate that schools use very structured techniques—including instruction on phonics. Many teachers did not learn this approach in college and have to be retrained.

Moats’ program, Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS), has become the preferred way for schools to meet the requirements. The course is famously long and rigorous. Teachers must delve into language theory and cognitive science. It isolates 19 vowel sounds and 29 consonant sounds in U.S. English. Moats’ ideas are generally associated with phonology (how words sound), but the program goes deeply into morphology (how words are built of parts) and orthography (how words are written). It’s also relatively pricey. Public contracts and appropriations suggest state-wide LETRS rollouts cost up to \$1,700 per educator. And it’s not clear that all the knowledge translates into better teaching methods.

But that hasn’t stopped 23 states from purchasing the program. In 2020, fewer than 25,000 teachers had enrolled in the 155-hour course, according to Lexia, the company that now owns it. In 2025, that number reached 700,000, mostly lower elementary. (There are approximately 1.5 million K-5 educators in the U.S., according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.) Michigan announced this summer it was spending \$75 million so that every reading teacher could do the course. (It has already spent \$44 million on teachers who did it voluntarily.) “The last three years, I have seen more money from this than I ever expected to see from it,” says Moats, who earns what she calls “a small royalty” on each sale.

Still, whether out of native New England reticence or because she’s almost sure she’s seen this movie before, Moats, now allegedly retired, regards this turn of events with mild suspicion. “It’s humbling, it’s a bit bewildering, it’s a bit surrealistic,” she says. Finally, when asked directly, she adds, “and yes, it’s very gratifying.” Educators may dismiss the idea of the reading wars, claiming teaching is not an us-vs.-them endeavor, but if they are real—and it looks like they are—it sure seems that Moats has emerged as a victor.

SHE INTENDED TO BE a folk singer. But having graduated from Wellesley College with a degree in music, Moats needed a job, and her sister got her one in Boston, with a researcher in the emerging field of neuropsychology, who needed people to type up reports. He also needed a lab technician, so he trained Moats to administer tests. “That’s how I learned to think about the kids with learning disabilities who were sent to our clinic,” she says. “I learned how to think of them through this neurological lens.”

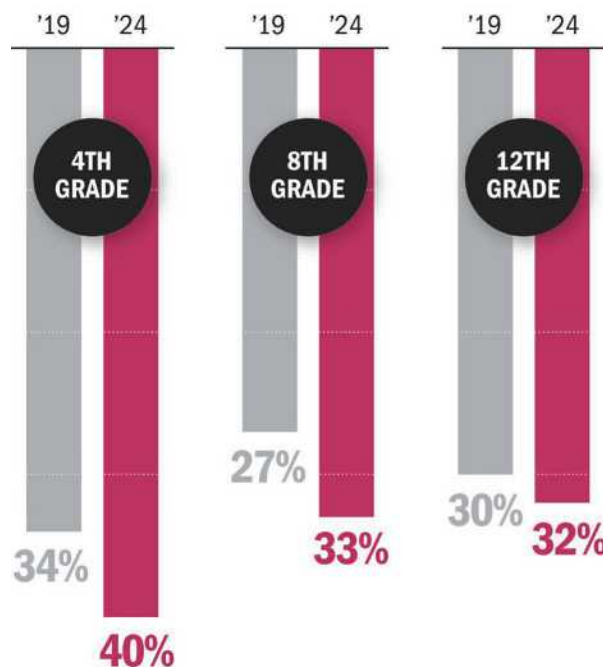
When Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College offered one of the first fellowships for a master’s in learning disabilities, Moats jumped at the chance to move to Nashville. “I tromped up and down Music Row and got a contract as a songwriter and got a master’s degree in learning disabilities,” she says. “It was fun, and it was completely worthless as far as learning how to teach.” Armed with a balance beam, a chalkboard, and some visual aids, she was hired to “cure” learning disabilities in local schools. “The experience of the total disconnect between what I learned in a master’s program and the realities of the kids and their needs,” she says, has given her sympathy for teachers now realizing

that the methods they learned in college might be flawed.

Even though her music career was progressing (she had a songwriting contract with Screen Gems) and her career in special education was opening doors (she had a parent-teacher meeting with Johnny Cash), Moats was not a Nashville type. She found the music industry predatory and missed the snow. (Her daughter Charlotte would later become a Junior Olympics ski champion.) She moved back

READING REGRESSION

The share of students performing below NAEP Basic, meaning they had not reached even a partial mastery of the knowledge and skills expected for their grade level, grew from 2019 to 2024



SOURCE: NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH, WHOSE READING FIRST INITIATIVE LED TO THE CREATION OF LETRS, VISITING A MILWAUKEE SCHOOL IN 2002



to her old job at Tufts–New England Medical Center and claims she more or less fell into a doctorate at Harvard, where she encountered the terrifying but brilliant linguist Carol Chomsky, wife of Noam, and Jeanne Chall, after whom Harvard’s reading lab is named. “Chall was the one who got me into understanding how to look at spelling errors in a very detailed and informed way,” says Moats.

She began to observe that children who couldn’t read or spell just did not register the relationship between the sounds in a word and the letters. They struggled especially when the words sounded a little alike but were spelled very differently, as in *juice* and *choose*, or spelled alike but pronounced differently as in the *s* sound in *was* and *saw*. Moats came to believe teaching kids to read entails understanding a lot more about the brain and language processing than the average teacher knows.

In the mid-1980s, after a few years of helping struggling readers, from impoverished children to Dartmouth academics, in her private practice in East Thetford, Vt., Moats realized that earlier intervention was needed. So she began to teach teachers. She gave her incoming postgraduates surveys. “The results were appalling,” she says. “They didn’t know anything.” Many had been taught the whole-language theory of reading, which suggested that teaching students to decode words distracted them from understanding their meaning, and therefore students should learn the words as a unit, not by blending graphemes. She wrote an academic paper about it, which was republished by the American Federation of Teachers in 1995.

A few years earlier, another literacy researcher, G. Reid Lyon, had been put in charge of creating and overseeing a federally funded reading-research network, investigating how children learn to read and why some don’t. He asked Moats to help. “What I needed was a leader and a teacher and a teacher of teachers, which she was extraordinary at,” says Lyon, also now retired in Vermont. “A lot of professors can get up there and quack away, but they don’t really have the wherewithal to demonstrate it. She did.” Moats was assigned to the Washington, D.C., site.

“Boy, did I have impostor syndrome,” she says. “Here I was in this room full of eminences, and I had been reading their work, I’d been citing them, I’d been learning from them.” She also had some hard lessons to learn as a northeastern hippie in a majority-Black school district. “I just couldn’t believe the state of affairs in these schools,” says Moats. “Libraries with no books, no doors on the lavatory, no running water in the sinks.” She labored to get the teachers to trust her. Eventually, one of her assistants took her aside. “She said, ‘You’re the director, you’ve got to look like the director,’” recalls Moats, who favors denim and heavy glasses. “I said, ‘You have any advice?’ She said, ‘Go to Ann Taylor.’” The project was a success, her nine schools’ reading rates soared, and local politicians started to drop by for photo opportunities.

Then national politicians took notice too. The No Child Left Behind Act that President George W. Bush signed in 2002 enshrined the work of Lyon’s team and the National Reading Panel. Moats was tapped to write the teacher-training component of the act’s Reading First initiative, which became LETRS.

Reading First was expensive—about a billion dollars was spent on a few million children—and the law mandated that a report be made of how effective it was by 2008. The news was not great. While students had been taught in a way that research had said was most effective, and first-graders did decode words better, elementary students as a whole were not better at understanding what they read than the students

‘IT’S HUMBLING, IT’S A BIT BEWILDERING, IT’S A BIT SURREALISTIC.’

—LOUISA MOATS

who were not part of the initiative. An Institute of Education Sciences (IES) report on LETRS in particular found that while the training improved teachers' understanding of language, it did not improve outcomes for students.

Moats is still steaming about that analysis. "You don't get an impact on student achievement after one year," she says. "You've barely gotten through the professional-development material." She also notes that after four years of Reading First, many state-level reading analyses showed improvement, especially in high-poverty regions. Nevertheless, Reading First's funding was not renewed, and states were allowed to go their own way with reading instruction.

IT IS PERHAPS REDUCTIVE to boil this history down to a battle between two women. But it is also true that around the time Moats and her colleagues were doing their work, another approach was ascendant, championed largely by a figure with a lot of the kind of main-character energy that Moats lacks. The founder of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) at Columbia University, Lucy Calkins, promulgated the idea of balanced literacy, which purported to be a détente between the phonics camp and the whole-language advocates. Calkins, whose background was in writing instruction, believed that children first of all needed enticing books at a level they could manage and a ton of cheerleading. "I always knew phonics mattered," Calkins says now. "When kids write, every single minute of what they're doing shows their phonics." Nevertheless, the curriculum materials she authored had little phonics, and suggested that teachers use a separate phonics course.

MOATS IN A CLASS OF MIDDLE-SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CLAYTON COUNTY, GEORGIA, IN 2018

"A lot of people who have a casual acquaintance with the research have persuaded themselves that balanced reading instruction means a little of this, a little of that," Moats wrote in a seminal essay about balanced literacy in 2000. "Take a cup of phonics from one cupboard, add a half-pint of whole language from the fridge, and the resulting blend will succeed with children while avoiding the battles and conflicts of the 'reading wars.' Everyone will be happy, and all will be well. The problem is that it doesn't work that way."

This was the world that Margaret Goldberg was introduced to after she completed her master's degree at UC Berkeley. In 2015, she arrived at a Title I Oakland school and quickly found that the methods she used in higher-performing schools just down the road did not work. After discovering Moats' essay via Google, she started using more structured literacy methods with some of her classes and took a balanced-literacy approach with others. "I didn't realize that I was teaching on both sides of the reading wars," says Goldberg, who co-founded the Right to Read Project in 2019. The results were stark. "All of the ideals of balanced literacy were happening with the kids who were being taught systematically and explicitly how to decode. The students I was teaching balanced literacy to—I was just trying to sell them on reading."

Eventually, parents, especially those with dyslexic chil-



dren, who tend to need more explicit phonics instruction, began to protest. Mississippi, which gave all its K-3 teachers LETRS training starting in 2014, was the first state to improve its numbers. By 2019, its fourth-grade NAEP reading score had risen 10 points from 2013—the largest gain of any state during that period. LETRS wasn't the sole reason for Mississippi's success. The state also added new practices around teacher coaching and accountability, more student screening and intervention, and held back a bunch of third-graders. But the teacher training was key.

Meanwhile, public-radio journalist Emily Hanford amassed enough evidence against the balanced-literacy methodology to publish a 2018 audio documentary that would become her influential *Sold a Story* podcast. But change, especially to higher education, came slowly. Carol Tolman, one of the co-authors of later versions of LETRS, was an early trainer in the program. At one college, she says, "there was a letter on my podium, just saying, 'We don't need the likes of you here. As soon as you leave, this is all going to change and go back.' I mean, it got really heated."

Alabama piloted the use of LETRS in 2018, and expanded it to the whole state in 2021, by which time South Carolina and North Carolina were also jumping on board. In 2022 they were joined by Kentucky and Arkansas. In 2021 North Carolina approved almost \$50 million to train its K-5



educators using LETRS. Not all of them appreciated it. “I’m all for the science of reading. I’m all for providing structured sequence materials to teachers,” says John Davis, who did the training as a third-grade teacher. But he knew a lot of the material already. And the main curriculum used in his school was not aligned with LETRS methodology. “You spent all this money and time on this training, and it’s not showing up in our reading curriculum?” says Davis. “It just seems like a waste.”

Even Calkins came around—a bit. She rereleased her curriculum materials a few times, adding more phonics emphasis, but criticism of some of the methods she recommended mounted, and after Columbia University detached itself from TCRWP in 2023, she founded her own institute. “I am all for what I’ve learned from the science of reading, and also the new relationships I’ve developed and the new organizations I belong to now,” she says. “All that’s been helpful, but it’s awful to have teachers teaching in ways they don’t believe in.”

Indeed, the prospect of yet more mandatory training brought many teachers zero joy. Lisa Anderson was one of them. She had been an elementary teacher in Minnesota for more than 20 years when she was required in 2022 to undertake LETRS. “Another hurdle, something more to jump through,” she says. “The pendulum’s swinging, we jump on, and let’s see where this one lands.”

That feeling lasted until about halfway into Volume 2. Before she’d even completed the program, she began to implement some of its methods and saw surprising results. Students were starting to read, even many who were floundering. A new emotion emerged: anger. Why had she never been shown this information before? She was moved to write to her alma mater, Bemidji State, and demand a refund of the fees associated with the courses she had taken on teaching children to read. “You didn’t do your job,” she says she told them. (A spokesperson told *TIME* that the college continually updates its curriculum in accordance with state standards.)

WHILE LETRS’ SUCCESS has assured Moats a comfortable retirement, she is still hoping that it will pay other dividends. “I hope that maybe we’re getting beyond the reading wars,” she says, meaning that the correct way to teach reading has been established. “But I don’t feel that secure about what it is I’m trying to teach actually taking hold. I think people do the course, but they don’t realize the power of the information.”

Sitting on a chair in her dining room, not far from the guitar on another one, is a spelling sheet from a second-grade child in California that a teacher has sent through asking for help. Moats sighs deeply as she reads it. (“She sighs a lot,” says Lyon.) The child has written all the -*igh* words (*thigh*, *high*, *fight*) like -*ing* words (*thing*, *hing*, *fing*). “He’s trying to memorize letters by their appearance. He has no idea about the correspondence between speech and print,” she says. Even today, five or more years after the science-of-reading revolution began and decades after the Reading Panel, “this teacher cannot look at these writing samples and recognize poor phoneme awareness.” (Surveys suggest that even with all the legislation and training,

‘THIS IDEA THAT
NOBODY WAS
TEACHING PHONICS,
IT JUST IS ABSURD.’

—TIMOTHY SHANAHAN, FORMER CHICAGO PUBLIC
SCHOOLS READING DIRECTOR



no more than half of K-3 teachers are using science-of-reading techniques.)

LETRS is also hitting critical mass just as Moats cedes control over the quality of the training, to the consternation of some of the earlier employees. “The mission became the money,” says Leta Palmiter, a former LETRS trainer who joined the company shortly after Lexia was bought by the private-equity firm Veritas Capital in 2020. “Not the people who received the training.” A Lexia spokesperson says improving literacy “remains at the heart of everything we do.”

It’s too soon to tell whether any of the states that have newly adopted LETRS have managed to improve the reading skills of their students. And even if they do, it will be difficult to tell how much LETRS is responsible. A \$4 million five-year randomized study of its effect is under way, but the results will not be available until 2029. A recent analysis by the Kentucky Department of Education found that schools with higher rates of LETRS-trained teachers posted larger gains in reading proficiency than schools with lower rates, but it was an internal study. Meanwhile, NAEP reading scores ticked up a few points for 9-year-olds in 2025 (although not for 13-year-olds), and another national report showed improvement in K-8 reading skills from 2025 to 2026. “I think all this work can only help,” says David Liben, a literacy consultant and one of the authors of the 2010 Common Core standards. “I just don’t think that at this point we have the evidence that we can make a claim that we’re turning a corner now.”

Experts agree that teacher training alone is not a solution

“THE EVIDENCE FOR
WHAT WORKS WITH KIDS
HAS BEEN THERE FOR
MORE THAN 30 YEARS,”
SAYS MOATS

for America’s reading ills. “This idea that nobody was teaching phonics, it just is absurd,” says former director of reading for Chicago Public Schools Timothy Shanahan, whose recent book *Leveled Reading, Leveled Lives* takes aim at balanced literacy, but who is also not sold on its replacement. For every Mississippi, he says, there’s

a state like Arkansas, where LETRS hasn’t seemed to make any difference. And the tight focus on teacher training has come at a cost to other urgent problems in education, like truancy. “Is it that the kids are getting poor instruction, or that our attendance levels are so low right now that kids just aren’t learning?” he asks.

Mistakes in education take a long time to show up, and so do fixes. By the time the students who learned how to read from LETRS-trained teachers are in the workforce, the landscape for communication may be unrecognizable. Even now, reading is not as vital to thriving as it was a mere five years ago. There are remarkable new ways to glean information and disperse it. Generative AI can write for us, and books can be read aloud by machines, so some of the disadvantages of being illiterate may be overcome by technology.

But the ability to recognize and manipulate written words will still be a critical skill, say most educators, because it is inextricably linked to thinking. Decades of research in psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, and education suggest that becoming literate changes how people reason, solve problems, organize knowledge, and deliberate on their own thinking. “The mental work that is reading,” says Moats, “is the essence of learning.” □

TIME100

THE WORLD'S MOST INFLUENTIAL RISING STARS

*With reporting by
Leslie Dickstein,
Simmone Shah, and
Olivia B. Waxman*

PHENOMS

ARTISTS

LEADERS

ADVOCATES

INNOVATORS

P H E N O M S

Ashley Padilla

COMEDIC SMARTS

BY BOB ODENKIRK

Ashley Padilla came to *Saturday Night Live* fully formed and ready to roll. She hopped on the back of the beast with confidence and steely fortitude. Her inspiration was her family, who are, in her words, “frankly, unable to be serious.” High marks to her hardworking, and hilarious, mom, who encouraged her to chase her dream.

Ashley’s self-awareness, skills, and fearless willingness to “get up there and laugh at myself” brought us the lady with the worst (and most expensive) haircut ever (“I like it,” she sadly insists); the woman trying to tell a joke about dogs; and, of course, “MAGA Mom,” who confesses she is beginning to “feel like ... he might be ... bad for our country.” She creates beautiful, human comedy out of small moments, with precision and joy that somehow always comes from a place of love.

Sketch comedy can crystallize the human condition like no other art form—it beats ol’ Shakespeare hands down—and Ashley delivers on this promise. She shows us recognizable people who, in compromised moments, fight like hell to restore their dignity; who can’t let it go; and who remind us of us ... if we can take it.

Odenkirk is an actor, producer, and Emmy-winning writer



Yerin Ha

BRILLIANT LEAD

BY NICOLA COUGHLAN

When *Bridgerton* was looking for a leading lady for Season 4, they started a global search. The *Bridgerton* books are beloved all over the world, so the pressure to cast the right person as Sophie Baek was enormous.

And when they found Yerin Ha, they really found an absolute diamond. Leading *Bridgerton* is a wonderful but intense experience. You feel the pressure because people love the show so much, but she never wilted. She dealt with it with such grace. She is someone who is so talented, and so brilliant at what she does.

Yerin is also just lovely to be around. She brings a great energy with her into every room. She's adaptable; she's easygoing. She came into our show and fit like a glove, like one of Sophie's gloves if you will.

She's one of those people who have that magic combination of great talent and great humility. So it's very exciting to see what she's going to do next. I, for one, will be watching from the front row.

*Coughlan is an actor and stars in *Bridgerton**



Sombr

ONE IN A MILLION

BY STELLA MCCARTNEY

Sombr grew up in a house where music was everywhere. His dad played in bands, and some of his earliest memories are of instruments and records being played around the house; I understand how much that impacts you. My parents shaped so much of who I am today—creatively, personally, and ethically.

What I love is how Sombr has taken his influences and made them completely his own in his 2025 debut album. The world has fallen in love with his music because it feels deeply emotional, vulnerable, and true to who he is.

Sombr represents everything that excites me about the next generation. He has his own voice, his own point of view, and he isn't afraid to be completely himself.

He is truly one in a million, a completely unique creature, so being one of a hundred honored by *TIME* is just the beginning.

McCartney is a fashion designer



Skye Duncan

DESIGNING SAFE STREETS

Skye Duncan believes in making city streets safer for all. As the executive director of the Global Designing Cities Initiative, she is building a way to design streets so they are safe for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders. Duncan's work has become more important as over half of the world's population lives in cities. She sees streets as the largest public space, arguing that cities designed for people traveling by foot, bike, bus, and even car will produce less of the pollution fueling climate change. Most modern urban streets are tailored for cars, but Duncan believes they should really be designed for kids to make them truly safe. To that end, her team manufactured a device made of cardboard and mirrors that lets adults see street level from the height of a child, to help them see hazards in a new way. Under Duncan's leadership, the Global Street Design Guide has been translated into nine languages and endorsed by over 130 cities, regions, and organizations around the world.

—Olivia B. Waxman



Adrien Bilal

ASSESSING
CLIMATE IMPACT

BY BILL MCKIBBEN

Economists failed badly in the early years of the climate fight, assuring the world that real damage wouldn't come until late in this century. Now, amid fires, floods, and soaring insurance premiums, Stanford University's Adrien Bilal has offered a far more coherent analysis of the economic effects, and potential costs, of climate change. He wrote, for instance, that if we increase the planet's temperature by an additional 2°C, "we found that would reduce output and consumption by 50%. That's a big reduction. It's twice as big as the Great Depression but it's going on forever." As his award-winning seminal study dryly notes, "these impacts suggest that unilateral decarbonization policy is cost-effective for large countries such as the United States," which is econospeak for "what on earth are you doing propping up coal plants and shutting down wind farms?"

McKibben is an author and an environmentalist



Chase Infiniti

THE REAL DEAL

BY RUTH NEGGA

Chase Infiniti radiates. Her integrity and life force infuse everything she does, from the Oscar-winning *One Battle After Another* to her starring turn this year in *The Testaments*. Sovereign and sincere, vital and vibrant, her triumphant ascent over the three years we've known one another has been a total joy to witness. What astonished me when we worked together was her appetite for the work: she absolutely dug being on set and being part of the whole magical village it takes to make something. That enthusiasm is

no joke; her *joie de vivre* is the real deal. She'll put the fizz in your drink and a swing in your step. Her level of preparedness is parallel to the passion—she never missed a beat. With her clear sense of purpose and self-belief, Chase illuminates our own generative and creative capacities, inspiring and delighting in equal measure. She has a maverick air about her, one of those striking people who seem to be emissaries from the future, encouraging us to shift our gaze a little higher. I look forward to her smashing all and any boxes unworthy of her to smithereens.

Negga is an Oscar-nominated actor



Vaibhav Sooryavanshi

TEEN JUGGERNAUT

At just 15 years old, Indian cricket prodigy Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is fast becoming one of global sport's most electrifying figures. Born in a small village in India's Bihar state, he first grabbed headlines making his professional debut at 12, but his meteoric rise accelerated in 2024 when the Rajasthan Royals made him the youngest player ever bought at an Indian

Premier League (IPL) auction.

Blending explosive power with uncanny composure, the left-handed batsman wasted no time proving his worth. In April 2025, shortly after turning 14, Sooryavanshi became the youngest player—and youngest centurion—in IPL history.

Sooryavanshi's ascent reached new heights in 2026, when he powered India to the Under-19 World Cup title, while claiming Player of the Tournament honors. Months later, he surpassed Sachin Tendulkar as the country's youngest-ever senior international player to debut against England. But being new to international play didn't affect his confidence. "For whatever duration I am on the ground, as long as I dominate and play, I can snatch the match from opponents' hands," he has said. —Charlie Campbell

Rati Sahi Levesque

ALL-AROUND MOGUL

BY STEFAN LARSSON

When I served on the RealReal's board, what struck me most about Rati Sahi Levesque was her ability to grow as a leader through every stage of a company's evolution. From the RealReal's earliest days through its IPO and growth into a billion-dollar business reselling authenticated luxury goods, Rati has continued to evolve alongside the company she now runs. While many leaders excel at one stage of a company's journey, there are few who can lead through all of them.

Rati has the ability to bring together everything it takes to build a great business. She understands the consumer, product, marketing, and technology and knows how those pieces come together to build stronger connections and experiences.

She continues to learn and adapt while staying relentlessly focused on the consumer. That is what makes her exceptional at what she does.

Larsson is CEO of PVH Corporation





Arch Manning

LIVING UP TO THE HYPE

BY MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY

As football royalty playing for the biggest brand in the college game at the University of Texas, Arch Manning has faced a hype train like we've never really seen before. Last year, people wondered what was wrong if he threw a frickin' incomplete pass. But now, after a promising second half to last season, some added offensive weapons, and most importantly some time to settle into himself, the occasion for Arch's inner confidence to deal with the brightest lights has never been more lit.

Is he gonna win the Heisman? Enter the draft or stay at UT? TBD. But remember, the Manning family measures the big picture of their own success with a longer view than any of us on the sidelines—they don't try to get anywhere, they make their own decisions, take care of business where they are, then show up where they're supposed to be. Personally, I'll take that bet.

McConaughey is an Oscar-winning actor

Alex Consani

TRAILBLAZING SUPERMODEL

BY CHARLI XCX

Alex Consani walks into a room and lights the whole thing up. Not only is she a literal supermodel, she's also got an effervescent and infectious personality that everyone loves being around. Obviously, we've seen the hilarious TikToks and backstage interviews, but I think my favorite side of Alex is when she's kind of just chilling. I find her at parties because I know I'm going to have a really soothing, introspective conversation. I learn something new not only about her but also about myself. That's a really beautiful thing in the fast-paced worlds we both exist within.

Watching her on the runway always gets me hyped. She's brought the personality back to fashion: the ferocity, the softness, the fantasy. Being both a trailblazer and a student of runway history allows her to honor her predecessors and also put her own stamp on things. I've been thinking about the perfect word to describe her while writing this out on my Notes app, and there really is only one: superstar.

Charli xcx is a Grammy-winning musical artist



Yu Deng

FINDING PATTERNS

BY STEVEN STROGATZ

Big things are made from hordes of little things. This duality between the individual and the group runs through some of today's greatest scientific mysteries. How does consciousness emerge from billions of neurons? An immune response from swarms of cells?

There are very few places where science can rigorously bridge the gulf between the micro and the macro. Mathematician Yu Deng has found remarkable new ways to do it. He and his collaborators have shown how the smooth flow of air and other gases emerges from enormous numbers of tiny, billiard-ball-like particles ricocheting according to Newton's laws. Deng's secret weapon is combinatorics: finding hidden patterns in the explosion of possible interactions.

For breakthroughs like these, Deng, 37, won one of this year's Fields Medals. His ideas may someday help us span the micro-macro gulf in other complex systems.

Strogatz is a mathematics professor at Cornell University and a co-author of the forthcoming Big Math

Olivia Miles

POISED PLAYER

BY SUE BIRD

Olivia Miles has brought her own style to the WNBA. Not only in the way she plays, but also in the way she shows up on the court: her hair, the goggles. If you go to a Minnesota Lynx game, you'll see tons of people in the stands, from fully grown men to little kids, rocking Afros. It feels like the league is adapting to her and not the other way around.

Olivia was still in college when I first met her, but I was immediately struck by her self-confidence. There's an air of wisdom about her that is beyond her years. She's always known exactly who she is as a person and a player.

She has had such an impressive first year in the WNBA that you can imagine her having great individual success; you can imagine her winning championships. What's fun is that we get to watch her do it all in real time. Olivia is only just beginning to scratch the surface.

Bird is a four-time WNBA champion and five-time Olympic gold medalist



Sasha Gordon

DRAWING THE UNSEEN

BY CHANEL MILLER

Every human must contend with the constraints of the body; inside each one a sea of feeling and conflicting identities are sealed. Painter Sasha Gordon reckons with these depths and contradictions by conjuring realms where all facets of being can exist, unguarded and exposed. At 28, she's had multiple solo exhibitions in major cities—including the captivating “Haze” in New York City in fall 2025—earning acclaim for her mesmerizing figures that are gloriously alive and engaged even when in nightmarish play. Gordon is determined to surface elements of self that society seeks to repress. It makes being in the presence of her work feel like a relief.

Gordon's portraits feature serene characters that simmer with undertones of violence, rupture, and self-reckoning: two soft-bodied women in a wooden boat in a placid pond, the glowing patch of one of their scalps plucked clean. Pointy crescents of fingernail clippings placed on the tip of a curious tongue. A head held underwater, still as stone, eyes laced with urgency. This is her immense power; to unsettle us from a contained, palatable existence, and embolden us to be in companionship with our shadow selves.

Miller is an author and artist



Michael Truell

RECORD-BREAKING
FOUNDER

In an industry that reinvents itself every quarter, Michael Truell is taking the long view. It was clear in 2022, he says, that we'd “get to a place where all of the code in the world was going to be written by [AI] models.” As co-founder of Anysphere, he has steered his company through a period of rapid growth.

Anysphere created Cursor, a tool for automating software development. In June, Anysphere's annualized revenue reached \$4 billion—double what it was in February. In August, it was acquired by Elon Musk's SpaceX for \$60 billion—a record-breaking sum. Truell, 26, has seen the competitive landscape evolve several times since Cursor entered the market. His company's main competitors have shifted from other coding startups to frontier giants such as OpenAI and Anthropic, which possess staggering resources. But now Truell is attached to a giant himself. The deal with SpaceX grants access to huge amounts of computing power, necessary for training frontier models. Recently, he said that scale-up should let Cursor reach the frontier, “and hopefully, soon leapfrog it.”

—Tharin Pillay



Robert Wun

STYLING THE STARS

Robert Wun is a modern couturier. He has the bona fides—the fashion-school degree, industry recognition, a star-studded fan base—as well as a truly global perspective. The Hong Kong–raised, London-based designer established his namesake label in 2014, with distinctive designs rooted in exaggerated proportions and pleated finishes.

As he shifted to a made-to-order business, celebrities and stylists paid attention. By the time he debuted at Haute Couture Fashion Week in 2023, he'd dressed Tracee Ellis Ross, Keke Palmer, and Janelle Monáe. He'd also designed a costume for a major film franchise, had a museum exhibit dedicated to his work, and gained powerful supporters, like Chanel executive Bruno Pavlovsky, who helped usher him into the hallowed world of haute couture. Wun's reach has skyrocketed, and he's become the go-to sartorialist for stars wanting to make a big statement, from Beyoncé and Cardi B to Naomi Osaka. He is one of the most exciting voices working in the industry.

—Ana Colón



Lauren Ireland & Marianna Hewitt

BEAUTY-BRAND BUILDERS

BY EMMA GREDE

Building a great brand hinges on the ability to create trust. Marianna Hewitt and Lauren Ireland understood early on how to turn audience insight into something much bigger. As creators, they built communities around a distinct aesthetic and point of view. As founders, they have managed to translate that instinct into category-defining products like their Jet Lag Mask. (My personal favorite—I never get on a flight without it!) Since then, they have expanded that success across multiple categories without losing the clarity that

made Summer Fridays resonate in the first place. They've built a beauty brand that feels both aspirational and deeply connected to its community, turning that relationship with the consumer into a competitive advantage—and making Summer Fridays one of the top beauty brands in the U.S. by many metrics. Through their leadership, and evident care, Marianna and Lauren are helping define what the next generation of founders looks like.

Grede is CEO and co-founder of Good American

Folarin Balogun

DETERMINED STRIKER

At the World Cup this summer, Folarin Balogun sent an unmistakable message that he's the new face of U.S. men's soccer. In his first Cup appearance, Balogun—who grew up in London but chose to compete for the U.S., where he was born—scored a pair of goals in a 4-1 trouncing of Paraguay, created an own goal in a victory against Australia, then scored again in the team's 2-0 round-of-32 win over Bosnia and Herzegovina. Balogun was such a potent force on the field that when FIFA overturned his one-game suspension for the round-of-16 tilt against Belgium, after a phone call from President Donald Trump, the world took notice. Balogun endeared himself to teammates and fans by maintaining a wide-eyed curiosity about America. "It's beyond explainable how special and unique my story is," Balogun said during the tournament. Expectations will rise for the U.S. at the 2030 World Cup. With Balogun as its striker, the team's on solid footing. —Sean Gregory



Cristina Etcheberry

FINTECH FOUNDER

Cristina Etcheberry is helping businesses across Latin America collect recurring payments without friction. Toku, a platform she co-founded in 2020, handles about \$8 billion annually for more than 500 corporate customers, including Chevrolet and major insurers like Zurich and MetLife. Toku aims to free businesses from chasing missed bills and matching payment records across disconnected banking systems.

Like technology, the Santiago, Chile native moves fast, decamping to Mexico City less than a week after deciding Toku would enter the country.

In 2025, it raised \$48 million in a Series A, the largest ever for a woman-led startup in the region, and Etcheberry has big plans for the platform's future. In March, Toku launched an AI agent that not only chases payments over WhatsApp, email, or voice, but can also arrange repayment plans—which the company says has reduced unrecoverable debts by up to half. —Harry Booth

ARTISTS

Chase Sui Wonders

MAGICAL PRESENCE

BY KATHRYN HAHN

I met Chase Sui Wonders on the set of our show *The Studio*, knowing very little about her except that she blew people away in her audition, could keep up with the funny, and had a very famous aunt (all you '90s queens know the fashion designer Anna Sui). By the end of Season 1, her character Quinn had emerged as the backbone of our show: fierce, competent, the voice of reason, and deliriously funny—my love and admiration for her is still growing and growing. My 16-year-old and all her friends were “obsessed,” which makes me so happy that they have this wickedly smart, savvy, and loyal person to look up to.

We shot in Venice this year, and one story encompasses what I adore about her. She wandered the city by herself on a day off, met a gentleman who owned a printing shop, spent hours with him and his son, and bought bespoke stationery with her initials. She couldn't wait to take me, and then to make sure everyone in the cast could go experience the magical afternoon she had had, getting lost for an afternoon in Venice. Chase is a magic person and I'm so excited to see what she does with her powers.

Hahn is an Emmy-nominated actor



Megan Moroney

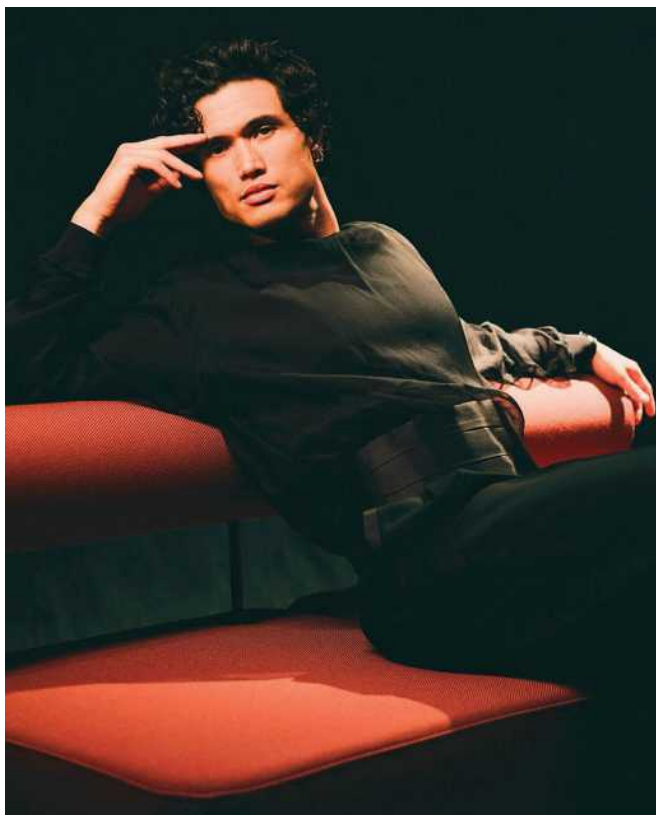
SKILLED SONGWRITER

BY TATE MCRAE

Megan Moroney has somehow figured out how to turn terrible men into extremely successful songs, which is both a talent and an incredible public service.

I've gotten to sing onstage with Megan a couple of times, and to spend some time with her in Nashville after the shows—which gives me the credentials to confirm for everyone: she is exactly what you wish and hope her to be. She is genuinely so kind, smart, and witty—as just one night out with her will make clear. But what I love most about Megan is how purely herself she is. Throughout her latest album, she tells stories that are incredibly specific and personal, and somehow make millions of people swear she wrote them about their lives. That kind of songwriting is rare, and watching her connect with people through it is really special. There is no one more deserving of all the success she is having right now.

McRae is a Grammy-nominated musical artist



Charles Melton

EXCELLENT TASTE

BY NATALIE PORTMAN

I first saw Charles Melton's work in his audition for *May December*. I was blown away by his performance. You can almost forget his physical beauty because there's so much soulfulness and intricacy in what he's doing, acting-wise. All of a sudden, he just embodies this guy who isn't confident and doesn't feel good in his skin, and you believe it. On set, Charles was eager to get as much as he could out of the experience—including arriving early to work with director Todd Haynes and on his own—which showed a lot of sophistication and an artistic sensitivity. Charles is making smart choices in his career, working with such interesting directors and following his own curiosity to projects like *Beef*. He's just got excellent taste. He's thoughtful, precise, and hardworking both as a colleague and a human. And best of all? He has that rare ability to be a very serious artist and a very good person at the same time.

Portman is an Oscar-winning actor



Joey King

SHINING BRIGHT

BY NICOLE KIDMAN

Joey makes me laugh. A full belly laugh. She's also someone I can sit and talk with for hours, about absolutely anything. And then I watch her onscreen and I see the future.

She's been acting for 23 years—and she's only 27!—building an extraordinary career from *Ramona and Beezus*, *The Dark Knight Rises*, and *Crazy, Stupid, Love* to *The Act*, *Bullet Train*, and *We Were the Lucky Ones*, always with curiosity, courage, humor, and a willingness to take risks.

Onscreen, she's been my daughter (*A Family Affair*) and now my niece (*Practical Magic 2*). But Joey has become so much more to me off-screen. She's someone I love and trust, and someone I know will be in my life long after the cameras stop rolling.

The Owens women of *Practical Magic* say, "My blood. Your blood. Our blood."

That's Joey to me. She's family.

Kidman is an Oscar- and Emmy-winning actor



Katie Dippold

WICKEDLY FUNNY

BY MATTHEW RHYS

The newly minted Emmy winner Betty Gilpin said it best: *Widow's Bay* is the ultimate “f-ck you” to algorithm-riently TV.

This is, of course, thanks to creator and show unner Katie Dippold. There is truly no one else I know who would combine two such polar opposite genres—supernatural horror and workplace comedy—with an almost perverse glee. In fact, I sometimes wonder if she is challenging herself or challenging those she works with. I’ve landed on the former. To do what she did and does and will do—marry horror and humor with such deft ease and grace—sings of someone with incredible mastery of her craft.

Everyone in this business always talks of what “alchemy” will work. Katie Dippold laughs at these questions, and dons a pointed hat with a star and a moon on it as if she’s the sorcerer’s apprentice.

But actually... Katie Dippold is the sorcerer. And she’s here to f-ck your algorithm.

Rhys is an Emmy-winning actor and producer

Conan Gray

BIG HEART

BY OLIVIA RODRIGO

Conan Gray was a kid with a YouTube channel who got a record deal from songs he wrote in his bedroom in Texas. Writing songs from the heart is such a unique skill, and he has a gift.

I remember so vividly seeing him play an arena in London. I bawled my eyes out with the crowd watching him perform “Family Line” because it’s such a brave thing to do, to take something traumatizing and awful and turn it into a song that will help other people feel seen. It’s a reminder of why we make art.

Offstage, Conan is always making me laugh, and he’s very much a caretaker too. We always joke that he was my husband in another life. He came to visit me recently, and when I got home from working one day, he’d bought groceries, cleaned, and done my laundry. He’s also whip-smart. Anytime we play games, he always wins, which is really annoying.

He’s the best, and my wish for him would just be to keep sharing his gift with others.

Rodrigo is a Grammy-winning musician



PinkPantheress

SINGULAR FORCE

BY KELELA

I was instantly floored the first time I heard PinkPantheress. People on Twitter had already been joking that she was my daughter, so I immediately had to hear it for myself. What I found is an artist who already knows exactly who she is. I understood why people were making the connection between us, but also why it was reductive to stop there because she’s not an extension of anybody. She writes her own songs, produces a lot of her own music, and has an incredibly potent sonic vision. And she’s doing all of this as a Black femme in a genre that has rarely made room for us, which means every track she makes is also a door staying open behind her.

Kelela is a musical artist



Sarah Pidgeon

TIMELESS TALENT

BY SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR

By definition, an It girl is someone with an ineffable quality—culturally relevant, with that unique blend of beauty, confidence, and magnetism that can't be taught or bought. So it is only fitting that Sarah Pidgeon was chosen to embody the ultimate It girl, Carolyn Bessette Kennedy. Like Carolyn, Sarah is one of one. A Carnegie Mellon graduate, she effortlessly jumps between stage and screen.

Her Tony-nominated performance in *Stereophonic* showcased both her powerhouse vocals and her heartbreaking vulnerability. And her role in this year's *Love Story* not only earned Sarah a much deserved Emmy nomination, but also introduced a global audience to how truly captivating she is.

Whether she's delivering a 17-page scene or smoking a cigarette in silence, you simply can't take your eyes off her. Just as Carolyn remained her authentic self despite all eyes being on her, Sarah possesses that same rare individuality. She is one of the kindest, most gifted performers and carries herself with such effortless poise, she seems as though she were plucked from another era. She is timeless. And that's exactly what makes an It girl impossible to manufacture. Sarah Pidgeon simply has it in spades.

Gellar is an actor

E.J. Lagasse

CULINARY PHENOM

BY ERIC RIPERT

E.J. Lagasse grew up surrounded by an extraordinary culinary legacy, but from a very young age, he understood the importance of finding his own voice. When he came to work with us at Le Bernardin at only 14 years old, I could already see his talent, but more importantly, I felt his curiosity, discipline, humility, and desire to learn.

There is something very special about watching a young chef discover who he wants to be. Today, at 23, as chef and co-owner of Emeril's, he has accomplished something remarkable, becoming the youngest chef to lead a two-Michelin-star restaurant. But what impresses me most is the confidence he has developed in his own cooking.

E.J.'s food is playful and refined, creative but deeply connected to New Orleans. A miniature oyster po'boy or an elegant interpretation of banana cream pie can stir a fond memory, and at the same time surprise you. That is not easy to achieve. I am proud to have watched him grow from that curious kid to the chef he is today.

Ripert is a James Beard Award-winning chef



Paapa Essiedu

ACTING WITH COMPASSION

BY BRYAN CRANSTON

I don't believe that empathy can be taught. It can be nurtured, but there has to be an innate sense that resides in a person. Paapa Essiedu has that innate sense of empathy, a compassion for people known and unknown to him.

I had the immense pleasure of playing his father in *All My Sons* in London and witnessed his outreach of interest in a person's well-being. It is genuine and intuitive. I actually had the conscious thought that he was so young to possess that depth of care and concern for others—something usually reserved for those who develop an insightfulness later in life, a softer side, if you will. This quality in Paapa has contributed mightily to his extraordinary talent as an actor, and a human being. He really is one in a hundred!

Cranston is an Emmy- and Tony-winning actor

Marisa Abela

ALCHEMIST

BY KIT HARRINGTON

In film and TV, the word *chemistry* is thrown around a lot: as in, “Do they have chemistry?” I’ve never really known what it means exactly, but I think we can all instinctively sense if it’s lacking when we watch two actors onscreen.

No one will ever sense its absence when they watch Marisa Abela. Marisa would have chemistry with a plank of wood. To act with her is to step into what feels like an arena teeming with possibility and truth, sparring with someone who brings their all to every single shot. Not only that, but she brings it with a supreme actor’s intelligence for the scene, and a generosity, warmth, and kindness that made acting with her on *Industry* one of the most enjoyable and exhilarating working experiences of my life.

She is, simply put, the best of the very best, and I envy all the many future (slightly wooden) male actors who are similarly elevated by her presence in a scene.

Harrington is an Emmy-nominated actor



Dominic Sessa

EMBODYING YOUTH

BY EMILIA JONES

Rather than rushing through decades of Anthony Bourdain’s life in *Tony*, our director Matt Johnson focused on the summer of 1975, capturing a formative moment in Bourdain’s youth.

Matt picked Dominic Sessa for the role, and he was perfect for it. He captures the confidence and rebelliousness of youth while still revealing the insecurity underneath. And he never tries to imitate the famous figure Bourdain would eventually become. Instead, he portrays him as a confused, arrogant and restless young man still searching for direction, which I think is a big part of why people have connected with the film. There’s often a tendency to sugarcoat biopics but I think *Tony* is special because Dom wasn’t afraid to show Bourdain’s flaws and in doing so, he made him feel undeniably human. Dom has become one of my closest friends, and one of the things I love most about him is how unspoiled he is. In a world where major achievements like *The Holdovers* and *Tony* could easily change someone, his humility and kindness haven’t wavered for a second and I don’t think they ever will. I think the world of him.

Jones is an actor who starred in Tony



Alex Warren

GEN Z LEGEND

BY JOE JONAS

When I first met Alex Warren to record a feature on his song “Burning Down” in 2024, we hit it off right away—he was so funny and full of energy. I learned then that even though he doesn’t take himself seriously, he’s a total professional when it comes to his music. He has so much passion for his craft that I knew right away he was someone I would want to keep working with. Alex is a true artist.

He’s also just a really good person. Months later, I met a young fan of his and texted to see if he could send a voice note saying hello. Instead, he sent a long video inviting her and her family to a show. I think that’s the best way to sum up who Alex is: a stand-up guy with a big heart who cares a lot about his fans and all of the people in his life. He’s a legend.

Jonas is a Grammy-nominated musical artist

Joshua Henry

VOCAL VIRTUOSO

BY LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA

Everyone who meets Josh Henry becomes a Josh Henry evangelist. Robin de Jesús was the first to tell me: “Write his name down. He’s the TRUTH. You HAVE to see him for *In the Heights*.” A month later, Josh walked in, quiet and confident. He started singing. His humanity and virtuosity laid bare, all in that voice. The Truth. My form of evangelism has been casting him in almost everything I’ve worked on: *In the Heights*; two companies of *Hamilton*; *tick, tick ... Boom!*—while cheering for him on Broadway in *Violet, Shuffle Along, Carousel*, and so many more. This season, The Truth transcended the arts page, as clips of his blazing portrayal of Coalhouse Walker Jr. in *Ragtime* made the rounds. TikToks of folks from all walks of life, melting at the sound of his booming baritone. At last The Truth had found a role that lined up perfectly with the Josh we have been lucky enough to know in life: a singular voice and a paragon of decency. Write his name down. He’s the TRUTH. You HAVE to see him.

Miranda is an award-winning composer, lyricist, actor, and director



Cooper Hoffman

ON THE RISE

BY OLIVIA WILDE

Unpretentious and brilliant, Cooper Hoffman is the most interesting young actor working today. I won’t forget his audition for our 2026 film *I Want Your Sex*. We sat in stiff chairs in a hot office in the Valley, but the moment he began the scene, Cooper lifted us to an alternate atmosphere. We felt the weather change in the room.

I had a feeling he would be an incredible actor, but I had no idea he’d also become one of my favorite people. Curious. Authentic. Brave. Deeply empathetic. Playful. Fast. Funny. Actually, rib-crackingly hilarious. And with zero entitlement. His talent has nothing to do with his genes, and yet his reverence for his parents, Philip and Mimi, envelops him in soulful humility. Cast him if you can. This kid is ascending.

Wilde is an actor and filmmaker



Eiza González

STAR POWER

BY DAVID BENIOFF & D.B. WEISS

It’s hard to say what makes someone a star. As the judge said, you know it when you see it. We knew it on Eiza González’s first night shoot. The way she walked, the way she talked, the way she smoked a cigarette—she’s a movie star from Hollywood’s golden age who somehow finds herself slumming in the streaming age.

On *3 Body Problem*, Eiza perfectly captured all the intelligence, intensity, and damage we were looking for in Augustina Salazar. Being a film and TV lifer gives her a lot of advantages. Beneath her seemingly effortless charisma, glamour, and wit is a strong practical understanding of every aspect of the filmmaking process. She knows editing, cameras, costume ... and more than anything, performance and character. In every role she inhabits, in every moment she plays, she always delves deeply into the reasons why people are doing what they are doing, and has a sixth sense for avoiding anything that feels false or contrived. It’s been a joy spending time with her, on and off camera, and we can think of no better companion on a trip to infinity and beyond.

Benioff and Weiss are Emmy-winning producers



Isa Briones

ONE OF A KIND

BY KATHERINE LANASA

Isa Briones is the coolest kid I know. The literal funny bone of *The Pitt* (sorry, pun intended), she moves between vulnerability, deadpan comedy, and gritty “don’t even think about messing with me” moments with the ease of an actor far beyond her years. And she can sing like nobody’s business. This spring’s Broadway turn as Connie Francis in *Just in Time* left me wondering, “Is there anything she can’t do!?” Her fierce dedication to accurate portrayals of Filipino women onscreen is an inspiration to many. But I personally admire Isa because she has the balls to be herself. She dresses in her own unique style, speaks truth to power, and she is kind. She shows us all that you don’t have to shape-shift to win.

LaNasa is an Emmy-winning actor

LEADERS

Raye

SOULFUL SINGER

BY ANYA TAYLOR-JOY

Raye is exactly that—a ray of sunlight. Warmth and depth radiate from her, both in person and through that extraordinary voice. The truth sounds better coming from her: powerful, honeyed, vulnerable, and knowing. As heard on her 2026 album, *This Music May Contain Hope*, she has that rare ability to make something deeply personal feel universal, turning heartbreak, humor, and hard-won honesty into music that reaches straight through you.

I was lucky enough to watch my friend perform at Glastonbury, and seeing her infectious spirit lift thousands of people into a collective reverie was one of those moments I'll never forget. There was joy, but also something deeper: the sense of watching an artist completely inhabit the place she has earned for herself. Raye has fought for her voice in every sense, and perhaps that's why we believe her when she sings. There's no distance between the woman and the artist. She is all heart, all soul—all Raye.

Taylor-Joy is an Emmy-nominated actor



Pawan Kumar Chandana

FUELING INDIA'S SPACE AMBITIONS

India wasn't the first nation to join the space race, but it's catching up fast—helped by Pawan Kumar Chandana, co-founder and CEO of Hyderabad-based Skyroot Aerospace. In July, Skyroot's Vikram-1 rocket successfully carried two customer satellites to orbit, becoming India's first private company to achieve that feat, and putting it in the same conversation as more established players like America's SpaceX and Blue Origin and Europe's Isar Aerospace, which made it to space in September. Chandana was an engineer with the Indian Space Research Organization, India's NASA, who left to establish Skyroot in 2018, believing there was no reason the world's most populous country could not birth a company that could succeed in the private space sector. Skyroot currently employs more than 1,000 people and has a valuation of \$1.1 billion—small compared with, say, SpaceX, but decidedly on the move. “The world ... needs more orbital capacity and more teams pushing the frontier,” Chandana wrote in a post on X after Isar's orbital success.

—Jeffrey Kluger



Luis Carlos Rúa

AUDITING PUBLIC PROJECTS

Five years ago, online videos began to spread in Colombia of a man in a full-body elephant costume, pointing out incomplete public infrastructure projects, which are nicknamed “white elephants.” He crisscrossed the country, submitting legal complaints and exposing billions in waste, all from inside the costume. This year, the White Elephant ran for Colombia's Senate; three days before election day, he revealed his identity as Luis Carlos Rúa, a local-government whistle-blower who had been forced out of his job and his hometown. He won.

The country's new President, Abelardo de la Espriella, has prioritized an aggressive audit of the last government—all while rewarding his allies and favoring other right-wing states, from the U.S. to Argentina. For Rúa, who occupies a slim independent legislative bloc in the Senate, the challenge is whether he can build a coalition of support for real change without risking his political integrity. —Ivan Plis



Jake Auchincloss

A CENTRIST APPROACH

As new forces move the Democratic Party further left, Representative Jake Auchincloss is making the case for a different path. Despite facing a Democratic Socialist of America member as a challenger, the Massachusetts Congressman coasted through his primary this year while championing a moderate approach to tackle the affordability crisis, from building more housing to taking on the pharmaceutical middlemen that drive up health care costs.

But his centrism has not stopped Auchincloss from taking an aggressive tack on corporate power. An outspoken critic of Big Tech, he has pushed safeguards for children, tighter oversight of social media platforms, and a steep tax on the largest companies' digital-advertising revenue, which would fund education and local journalism. As Democrats face an identity crisis, Auchincloss's politics offers one vision for the party's path forward. —Nik Popli



Brendan Foody

SUPPLYING DATA

In June, some journalists received LinkedIn messages offering them staggering rates, up to \$1,000 per day, to work on a temporary contract for a tech company called Mercor. The catch: their labor would probably be used to help AI firms automate parts of reporters' jobs.

Mercor's CEO Brendan Foody, 23, has established his company as one of the chief suppliers of specialized training data for AI firms. It hires highly qualified professionals to perform tasks like those they would usually do in their jobs, records them, and then sells this data to AI companies. The staggering progress of AI models this year across coding, math, finance, and more has come in part by training models on this expert data, which can teach AI the kinds of tacit knowledge not present in textbooks or online posts. But the highly paid experts are not paid for very long. Meanwhile, Mercor is now valued at \$10 billion, and Foody is one of the world's youngest self-made billionaires.

—Billy Perrigo



Naomi Girma

ATHLETIC ANCHOR

BY ALEX MORGAN

Every once in a while, a generational player comes along who serves as an anchor both on and off the field. Naomi Girma is already an Olympic gold medalist and made history as the first women's soccer player to command a transfer fee of over \$1 million when she joined Chelsea from the San Diego Wave, where we were teammates. She's the hardest defender I've ever had to play against, and her influence on the sport is already immense. But Naomi's impact extends far beyond the field. As the daughter

of Ethiopian immigrant parents, she brings Ethiopian fans out to her games, connecting with a community that has long been underrepresented in the sport. Her impact on the field is undeniable, but it's the way she leads, brings people together, and uses her platform to make a difference that sets her apart. In 2027, Naomi will lead the U.S. from the back line as the team pursues another World Cup title. Watching all that she has already accomplished, and knowing how much more she has ahead, is a privilege to witness.

Morgan is a World Cup and Olympic champion soccer player and entrepreneur



James Blair

POLITICAL TACTICIAN

James Blair may be the most important person in Donald Trump's Washington you've never heard of.

At 37, he is orchestrating the President's midterm strategy, an effort that could shape Trump's final two years in office. Before taking leave from the White House to oversee Trump's political operation, Blair served as deputy chief of

staff, managing the West Wing's relationship with Congress and helping to pass Trump's signature "One Big Beautiful" tax-and-spending bill.

Blair entered Trump's inner circle during the 2024 campaign. He soon became one of the campaign's savviest tacticians, targeting low- and mid-propensity voters and steering Trump away from a national abortion ban. Trump has nicknamed him Brilliant James.

Now Blair faces his toughest assignment yet: preserving the Republican congressional majorities that have enabled Trump to govern with few constraints. Whatever happens in November, he's already proved himself a hard-charging operative—and one of the GOP's rising power players.

—Eric Cortellessa

Shamma Al Mazrui

MAKING MOVES

BY DAMILOLA OGUNBIYI

I was barely 30 when I held my first leadership roles. I remember how daunting yet fulfilling it was being the first female managing director of the rural electrification agency in my home country, Nigeria. Shamma Al Mazrui is redefining leadership, as the UAE's minister first of youth and now community development. In 2016, she became the world's youngest government minister at 22. She has proved young people are not just leaders of tomorrow but architects shaping today. This year, she launched a \$27 million fund to strengthen nonprofits across the UAE. "Anyone can be a leader," she has said. "As long as they are driven by the pure intention to serve people." This is what should define leadership, not age or gender, but a deep sense of service. Trailblazers like Shamma show what's possible when young women have a chance to lead.

Ogunbiyi is CEO of Sustainable Energy for All and a co-chair of UN-Energy





Andy Kim

RESOLUTE SENATOR

Senator Andy Kim made headlines in May for getting pepper-sprayed by ICE agents outside the Delaney Hall detention facility in Newark, N.J. It was the clearest example of a spirit that Kim has brought to the Senate since his 2024 election. The 43-year-old son of South Korean immigrants, Kim has pushed for improved conditions for those being detained as well as broader immigration reform. As a millennial, he often describes himself as part of the sandwich generation, tasked with raising young children while caring for aging parents. Kim grounds his politics in that sense of familial responsibility, focusing on senior care, childcare, and affordable housing. This summer, he unveiled a plan to enroll every child in Medicaid. —*Philip Wang*



Heidi Reichinnek

BUILDING SUPPORT

"We don't just talk. Above all, we listen." That's what Heidi Reichinnek, 38, says is key to explaining the rise of Germany's left-wing Die Linke party, which she co-leads in parliament. Reichinnek's effective use of social media has fueled her success—her fiery condemnation of soon to be Chancellor Friedrich Merz for accepting

support from the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) during a 2025 debate over migration policy vaulted her to wider recognition. Die Linke earned 25 new seats in the Bundestag during last year's federal election, bringing its total to 64 and making it the country's fifth largest party.

Since these significant gains, she has helped maintain Die Linke's foothold despite the growing power of the AfD. Reichinnek is putting the cost of living and social progress—from food and energy prices to education and health care—at the heart of her policies as she argues for a different vision of Germany's future. "The better off people are," she says, "the weaker the far right becomes."

—*Callum Sutherland*

Rob Jetten

PROGRESSIVE PM

BY KRISTRUN FROSTADOTTIR

Rob Jetten represents a new generation of leadership in Europe. Confident, open, and optimistic.

As Climate and Energy Minister, Rob helped accelerate the Netherlands' transition to clean energy. And over the past year, Rob has shown that hopeful politics can still win. He brought his party back from opposition, built momentum around a clear pro-European and climate-conscious agenda, and, this past February, became the youngest Prime Minister in Dutch history.

I feel a natural kinship with Rob. We both lead progressive European countries that depend on cooperation, strong institutions, and an outward-looking approach to the world. We also share a fundamental belief in eye-to-eye conversation. That you can be ambitious in politics but still give yourself time to actually talk to people.

Rob combines conviction with an ability to bring people together. At a time of growing division, that matters. Europe needs leaders who inspire hope. Rob is one of them.

Frostadottir is the Prime Minister of Iceland



Katie Britt

CONSERVATIVE DEALMAKER

Senator Katie Britt has quickly learned how to wield influence in Donald Trump's Republican Party while avoiding its hardest edges. Not long after she became in 2022 the youngest Republican woman ever elected to the Senate, Mitch McConnell invited her to join his weekly leadership meetings as an adviser, giving her access to the GOP's longtime power center.

Britt, 44, has since strongly backed Trump's agenda, including his aggressive immigration policies, while privately urging the Administration toward moderation at key moments. The Alabama lawmaker has also carved out her own policy lane around families and children. Britt pressed Trump to protect IVF after an Alabama court ruling threatened access to the procedure, helped secure expanded childcare tax credits, and has worked across the aisle on legislation protecting children from social media. Her ability to bridge divides within the GOP while cultivating bipartisan relationships has made Britt an increasingly consequential player in the Senate. —*Nik Popli*



Tyrese Maxey

ON POINT

BY LEBRON JAMES

Tyrese Maxey gets better every season, and he's really just getting started. Even more important than his getting better just as a player, I've seen him grow so much as a leader for our team on and off the floor. He's been doing the work, and it shows. We've been training together the past five years in the summertime, and our relationship off the floor definitely influenced my decision to come to Philadelphia and join the 76ers. Everything that has happened to him has happened for a reason. His best attribute: the type of person he is. He's a special kid, super down to earth, never gets too high or low, and walks in with a smile every single time. Great vibes. He's just a joy to be around. It's up to us as his teammates to continue to push him to be as great as he can be. I'm happy to be a part of it.

James is a four-time NBA champion

Shoko Kawata

HUMAN POLITICIAN

In 2023, Shoko Kawata became Japan's youngest-ever female mayor at age 33, when she was elected to lead the city of Yawata. Earlier this year, she made history again for a seemingly unremarkable decision: taking maternity leave.

While Japan provides maternity leave to workers, elected mayors fall outside those labor protections. With no precedent to follow, she created one. Kawata transferred her authority to the deputy mayor for 16 weeks while continuing to attend briefings remotely and be involved in major decisions. Kawata's decision drew significant backlash, illuminating the pressures working women in Japan continue to face. But she found support from residents. Many saw the criticism as reflecting the country's struggle to address its broader demographic crisis, as demanding workplace expectations and rising costs of living put parenthood increasingly out of reach.

Kawata's administration has reduced the price of school lunches, added free diapers at preschools, and pushed to provide more postpartum care. In her personal choices and her policy priorities, Kawata is demonstrating how Japan can become more livable for families.

—Miranda Jeyaretnam



Claudia Queragama

ANTI-FGM ACTIVIST

BY CATALINA MARTÍNEZ CORAL

Claudia Queragama has made defending women and girls her mission. An Indigenous Emberá Katío leader, she descends from a powerful and courageous line of women, and has a particular sensitivity to the protection of women's bodies, their stories, and their rights. In 2026, she helped spearhead a historic milestone in Colombia: the passage of an unprecedented law to prevent, address, and eradicate female genital mutilation. The first law of its kind in Latin America, it was a transformative step toward the recognition that all women can belong to and claim their cultures without giving up their rights, and can make decisions for themselves: over their own bodies, their own traditions, and in the spaces where the norms that shape their lives are defined. Claudia's impact transcends borders, reaching millions who want to challenge the structures associated with violence. This is only possible when leaders like Claudia stand up and take action to create the future they want for themselves.

Martínez Coral is a vice president at the Center for Reproductive Rights



Curry Barker

KILLER NEW VOICE

BY SETH ROGEN

I was a bit late to seeing *Obsession* ... so by the time I finally watched it, the movie was pretty hyped up. Even six weeks after it opened, the theater was sold out on a Tuesday night. The crowd was electric. And the movie over-delivered. Laugh-screaming is how I'd describe the sound the audience made. We interacted with the film as though it were unfolding in real life in front of us. It showed a level of cinematic intuition many directors will never have. We were on a ride. It was also technically impeccable, beautifully performed, expertly written, all for around \$750,000, and by a very nice guy in his early 20s. Curry Barker didn't set out to make a cultural phenomenon, he set out to make a movie with his friend. But a phenomenon is the result.

I've seen Curry's next film, *Anything But Ghosts*—and for those of you who, like me, are uncomfortable with this amount of talent in a person so young, I have bad news ... it's even better, and, to add insult to injury, he's just as good an actor as he is a director.

Rogen is an Emmy-winning actor, writer, director, and producer



Naama Lazimi

LEFT-WING LEGISLATOR

On July 14, the left-wing lawmaker Naama Lazimi took the plenum in Israel's Knesset and delivered a speech that brought the right-wing presiding officer to tears. The issue at hand was poverty and public housing, potent subjects in a crowded and complicated country still reeling from the attacks of Oct. 7, 2023. Lazimi, a charismatic leader of the Democrat party, has been dubbed the "superstar" of an embattled Israeli left no longer defined by support for a negotiated peace

with Palestinians, which she favors. Her primary focus is the deepening divisions in Israeli society and the authoritarian shift in governance under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. If the opposition prevails in Oct. 27 elections, Lazimi, 40, wants to be in a cabinet that distributes the nation's resources and burdens evenly, saying, "The fact that today democracy is treated as an uncomfortable or progressive value in the Education Ministry—that's a problem."

—Karl Vick

Andrew Ferguson

TOP REGULATOR

Big business was terrified of former Federal Trade Commission chair Lina Khan for her promise to bust monopolies that harm American consumers. But surprisingly, some businesses may be just as wary of the FTC's new chair, 40-year-old Andrew Ferguson. Since President Trump appointed him to FTC's top spot in 2025, Ferguson has centered enforcement actions on some of the same priorities as Khan, including continuing a case that obtained a \$2.5 billion settlement from Amazon for making it hard to cancel Prime memberships, and pursuing legal action against pharmacy benefit managers who allegedly drove up prescription-drug prices. Unlike his predecessor, however, some of his priorities further advance the MAGA agenda: he abandoned a planned near-total ban on noncompete agreements, for instance, and eliminated the FTC's diversity, equity, and inclusion practices.

Still, as Khan did, Ferguson appears to be focusing the FTC on its core consumer-protection mission. "We want to protect Americans," he said in congressional testimony in 2025, "when they shop for groceries, when they go to the hospital, and when they speak online." —Alana Semuels



Martha Wangari Wanjira

EXPANDING ACCESS

All politics is local, especially in poor rural villages like Gilgil, Kenya, which elected Martha Wangari Wanjira to parliament. There, she tackled a seemingly local problem with huge impact: many of her constituents lack basic documents like birth and death certificates, some because far-off government offices require lengthy travel. The impact is lifelong—without identification, it can be confoundingly difficult to attend school, seek employment, obtain a driver's license, cash a check, or claim inheritance.

Last year, Wangari pushed through a law compelling the government to open more than a hundred registry offices, and making identity documents a fundamental right for every citizen.

Even so, about 800 million people worldwide still lack vital documents, including about 19% of sub-Saharan Africans, according to World Bank estimates. Wangari took one crucial step in Kenya. But a lot is still to be done.

—Vivienne Walt

Siviwe Gwarube

ADVANCING EDUCATION

South Africa's youngest Cabinet member was just 4 years old when Nelson Mandela took power in 1994, promising a free "rainbow nation" after decades of suffocating racism. Raised by her grandmother in a poor rural village, Siviwe Gwarube was from the generation of Black students walled off by apartheid in resource-starved schools, severely constraining their prospects.

Now, at 37, Gwarube has the chance to write a new history as Minister of Basic Education. She has ditched old formalities with straight talk on social media, taken on skeptical teachers' unions, and dismantled crony procurement contracts. Despite representing the opposition Democratic Alliance party in a two-year-old coalition government, she has won over the Mandela-era grandees in power with charm and clarity. Her message: The country risks dire economic pain without vastly more investment in new schools and early learning. "Education is where productivity begins," she told Parliament in August, amid some grumbling from political foes. "We will not stop until we get it right."

—Vivienne Walt



Peter Magyar

TACKLING CORRUPTION

BY IAN BREMMER

In April, Peter Magyar's Tisza party ended 16 uninterrupted years of Viktor Orban's rule in Hungary. Orban's authoritarian-leaning regime—an inspiration to far-right parties across the West—posed a threat not just to Hungarian democracy but also to the European Union's identity as a bloc. In a time of surging Euroskeptic populism, Magyar's landslide victory offers the most unabashedly pro-European political outcome in the post-Brexit era.

How did Magyar do it? He's a conservative, originally part of Orban's Fidesz party, who is dubious about immigration and quick to invoke the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But in stark contrast to Orban, Magyar wants to root out the corruption in Budapest and pledged to rebuild institutions Orban weakened. His victory gives Hungary the opportunity to close the book on this illiberal period of its history, having proved that the people and institutions, the rule of law and democracy, are more powerful than one man. It's a lesson that should resonate from Europe to the U.S.

Bremmer is a TIME editor-at-large and president of Eurasia Group and GZERO Media

Maxwell Frost

GEN Z LAWMAKER

Maxwell Frost gets a lot of attention as not just the youngest member of Congress, but also the first from Gen Z. Now in his second term, the 29-year-old Democrat, whose Orlando district is home to the Universal Studios theme park, has made waves by leading on messaging bills like one calling for removing the Statue of Liberty in response to President Donald Trump's immigration policies. He has also impressed colleagues with more substantive efforts to cap EpiPen prices, ditch junk fees, and create a White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention.

Volunteering on Barack Obama's re-election bid got Frost interested in politics, but it was the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary that led him to activism, and a job with March for Our Lives. When a congressional seat opened, he accepted the recruiting calls. To help pay bills, he drove for Uber. These days, he is more often a passenger on the Capitol subway, headed to help his party figure out how to talk to his generation.

—Philip Elliott





Caro Claire Burke

BREAKOUT AUTHOR

BY ROXANE GAY

I started reading *Yesteryear* after hearing about the premise. As a TikTok aficionado whose algorithm is locked in with some popular trad wives (for reasons I cannot begin to understand), I was primed for a juicy novel about what a trad wife's life is

really like. The book does offer some of that, revealing how what we see on social media and what happens behind the facade are very different things. Then comes the twist, one I genuinely never saw coming. It was delightful to be truly surprised by a story. Suddenly *Yesteryear* became something darker, unpredictable, strange, and by the end, completely unhinged.

I was entertained from the first word to the last. I don't know a thing about its author Caro Claire Burke's personal life, but I do know she writes deeply engrossing fiction with sharp observations, dry wit, a dash of cynicism, and true unexpected turns. What more, really, do we need to know?

Gay is a best-selling writer



Anika Wells

SOCIAL RESET

BY JULIA GILLARD

As the world grapples with the extraordinary power of social media and the increasingly pervasive role it plays, Anika Wells has emerged as one of the most significant voices in a growing global movement to reframe the relationship between technology and the well-being of our children. As Australia's Communications Minister, she has championed world-leading reforms to protect young people from the harms of social media. Even in the face of intense opposition from some of the world's largest tech companies, she remains steadfast.

Guided by the vital objective of protecting our children and their future, she has overseen the introduction of online safety measures—including rules supporting Australia's social media minimum-age policy—that are designed to better protect young people. It has placed Australia at the center of conversation on online safety, accountability, and the responsibilities of Big Tech. Future generations will look back on her landmark changes as courageous and trailblazing.

Gillard is a former Prime Minister of Australia

ADVOCATES



Marie-Roseline Darnycka Belizaire

HEALTH HERO

BY TEDROS ADHANOM
GHEBREYESUS

I met Marie-Roseline Darnycka Belizaire in 2018, when she was helping to lead the World Health Organization's response to the 10th Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I could see she had a bright future.

Back then, whole communities lay beyond our reach, in inaccessible areas controlled by armed

groups. Marie-Roseline risked her own life by traveling to these areas to negotiate with those groups to secure access for WHO and our partners. That access let our teams trace contacts, carry out safe and dignified burials, and vaccinate those most at risk. Lives were saved and the outbreak was contained and ended,

in part because she refused to give up on people others had written off.

Today, Marie-Roseline is bringing the same passion and commitment to the current Ebola epidemic in DRC. She knows that outbreaks end not in treatment centers alone, but in villages, when families trust health workers



enough to call them early.

Marie-Roseline embodies the courage and compassion of health workers and WHO colleagues everywhere who run toward danger to protect others.

Ghebreyesus is the director-general of WHO



Conchita Cruz & Swapna Reddy

REPRESENTING
ASYLUM SEEKERS

When four Yale Law School students co-founded the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP) in 2015, they had one simple goal in mind: helping refugee families navigate the complex legal system in the U.S. The organization grew out of a trip to Dilley immigration detention center in Texas, where they represented a Honduran woman in immigration court, helping secure release for the woman and her son as well as legal status.

More than 10 years later, two of those students, Swapna Reddy and Conchita Cruz, continue to serve as co-directors of ASAP, now the largest nonprofit representing asylum seekers in the U.S. The group offers legal resources—including how-to guides on all aspects of the process, regular updates about changes to procedures, and a digital help desk staffed by lawyers—to, so far, more than 1 million immigrants from 175 countries. As rejections of asylum applications have soared under the Trump Administration, Reddy and Cruz's work has only become more vital. —Philip Wang

Troye Sivan

MAKING POP PERSONAL

BY KYLIE MINOGUE

Troye Sivan is a perfect 2020s pop star. Born into the digital age of music, self-discovery, communication, and fandom, he blazed a singular, sizzling trail. Hot-wired to pop's elusive and ever changing superpowers, he's rocketed into 2026 with his album *She's the Best*, supernova anew. Fans recognize something very personal in him. They see magnified versions of themselves, complete with life's challenges, wonders, and aha moments. To them, he's a hero and confidante. Of course, Troye is also a dazzling north star of gay achievement. With each new record, he steps deeper into his true self and we are here to celebrate his evolution. As a fellow Melburnian, I have loved watching his ascent to global renown. We so would've been friends in school. He's a "beaut" of Australia, beamed out to the world. Troye doesn't just make pop music to love. He makes pop music to believe in.

Minogue is a Grammy-winning musical artist





Anna Menon

COMING FULL CIRCLE

BY JESSICA MEIR

NASA astronaut Anna Menon embodies the trajectory of modern human spaceflight, at a time when the private sector is playing an increasingly pivotal role in a sphere historically led by governments. Anna has embraced opportunities to advance human spaceflight from multiple avenues, serving as a biomedical engineer in mission control at NASA, and then as a lead operations engineer and mission director at SpaceX, all while remaining a devoted mother. She realized her dream of reaching space, serving as the onboard medical officer on the innovative and high-risk Polaris Dawn mission in 2024. Anna's unique path circled back to public service in 2025, when she became the first NASA astronaut ever selected who had already been to space. As NASA returns to the moon and reaches toward Mars, Anna, and others with such diverse skill sets, are certain to play key roles in shaping this new era of collaborative space exploration.

Meir is a NASA astronaut currently based on the International Space Station

Ben Collins

MEDIA INNOVATOR

BY KARA SWISHER

They say he who laughs last, laughs best. And Ben Collins is the best. A journalist who covered the deadly serious issue of disinformation for NBC until 2024 has found a fresh approach to addressing the conspiracy theories that have run rampant across the media landscape, and, as CEO of satirical news site *The Onion*, he's putting those ideas into practice. Ben finds the humor in the news and uses it to point to the seriousness of the moment. If laughter is the best medicine, it turns out we need an IV drip of *The Onion* stat.

Since taking the helm, Ben has relaunched the print edition, growing its circulation to tens of thousands, and, following the bankruptcy of Alex Jones' disinformation juggernaut Infowars, relaunched that brand as a parody site in July. This success has been a bright spot in a bleak period for the media industry and Ben is pioneering innovative ways to reinvent the media as independent—and also hysterical, in the right way, again.

Swisher is a journalist and host of the podcast On With Kara Swisher



Tosin Eniolorunda

FUNDING POTENTIAL

BY TONY ELUMELU

I'm committed to identifying and encouraging the next generation of young African entrepreneurs. I believe the future of our continent lies in their hands. I am impressed by Tosin Eniolorunda—a young man who, like me, grew up without a silver spoon but still had the audacity to dream.

As the co-founder and CEO of the fintech Moniepoint, Tosin has given businesses access to banking and payment tools that can help unlock all of Africa's potential. His work in this area is critical, and feels complementary to what United Bank for Africa is doing across the continent. I commend him for his vision, his enterprise, and the disciplined focus that he brings to his company, which now serves over 20 million businesses and individuals. Tosin's success exists beyond just himself; other young Africans will see that he has succeeded and believe they can too.

Elumelu is chairman of Heirs Holdings and United Bank for Africa



Isidora Uribe Silva

POWERFUL VOICE

BY CATHERINE RUSSELL

Of the 1.3 billion people with disabilities worldwide, millions are children and young people who still face barriers to learning, participation, and belonging. Isidora Uribe Silva is breaking down those barriers. As a teenager with cerebral palsy, the young Chilean advocate founded Fundación Encuentra Tu Lugar—or Find Your Place—to help people with disabilities thrive in education, employment, and community life. Her work shows how a supportive environment can transform a child's life.

Last year, in recognition of her many achievements, the Roosevelt Foundation gave her its Freedom From Want Award, and the U.N. recognized her as a powerful voice for disability rights. Today, Isidora continues to build a network of young people advancing accessibility, opportunity, and mutual respect. By helping others find their place, Isidora found her own: opening doors for others as a leader and champion.

Russell is the executive director of UNICEF



Muhammad Azmi Abdul Wahab

RESTORING REEFS

Ecologist Muhammad Azmi Abdul Wahab is at the forefront of a sea change in coral-reef restoration. Coral reefs, which feed 25% of all marine species, have shrunk by around 50% over the past three decades as ocean temperatures rise because of climate change, and Wahab, 42, is working to bring them back.

He oversees the Coral Reproduction and Aquaculture team at the Australian Institute of Marine Science, which this year released nearly 45,000 seeding devices off the coast of Queensland

in one of the world's largest restoration tests on a coral-reef system. Wahab also co-leads the ReefSeed project, a program backed by the G20 Coral Research and Development Accelerator Program that gives local scientists the tools to restore reefs by growing coral anywhere in the world.

The work is already paying off: in the Maldives, a ReefSeed project is credited for producing some 10,000 juvenile corals across nine different reef locations.

—Olivia B. Waxman

Olsi Nika & Besjana Guri

PROTECTING THE VJOSA

The Vjosa River in Albania is one of Europe's last remaining undammed and free-flowing rivers. Environmental activists Besjana Guri and Olsi Nika intend to keep it that way.

For over a decade, as Albania has built infrastructure to fuel its rapid development, Guri and Nika have activated Albanians and the international community to draw attention to the Vjosa's cultural and economic value. More than 1,100 species call the river home, including dozens that are endangered. In 2023, their campaign helped persuade the Albanian government to declare the Vjosa Europe's first river national park, protecting it from dam developments. In 2025, they received a Goldman Prize in recognition of their efforts.

But the fight isn't over. New development, including plans to divert water from one of its protected tributaries and a Jared Kushner-backed luxury tourism project near its delta, continues to put pressure on the Vjosa ecosystem. As hundreds of thousands of demonstrators protest both the luxury project and corruption more widely, Guri and Nika are trying to ensure their biggest victory holds.

—Justin Worland



Wawira Njiru

FEEDING KIDS

BY TREVOR NOAH

If Wawira Njiru were running a multinational conglomerate, I have no doubt she would be celebrated as one of the most formidable business leaders of her generation. But instead, Wawira has chosen to apply her extraordinary logistical talents to something far more meaningful: making sure children can eat. Most impressive is how she has done it. Her Kenya-based nonprofit, Food 4 Education, has a model that is scalable, financially savvy, and built around a dignity seldom afforded to people in need. It strengthens local economies while feeding the children they serve. Her operation coordinates thousands of employees, hundreds of kitchens, farmers, technology, and distribution, delivering over 600,000 meals each day to children across more than 1,500 schools. She began with one kitchen that fed 25 children. Today, governments across the world are learning from what she built. And judging by how fast she continues to grow, it is easy to see why Wawira has set her sights on feeding 1 million children a day.

Noah is an Emmy-winning comedian



Julia Reichelstein

BURYING CARBON

BY NAN RANSOHOFF

Vaulted Deep CEO Julia Reichelstein saw that a technology developed decades ago could also be used to permanently store carbon deep underground—and that using a technology already operating at scale could mean scaling quickly. We at Frontier, through which \$1.8 billion is committed to buying carbon removal, were Vaulted's first customer. After just a year of operating, Vaulted was delivering more permanent carbon removal than any other similar company. Today, it still leads the market for deliveries. In an industry where moving from idea to scale can take years, Vaulted has moved unusually fast.

Mitigating climate change requires both speed and scale. Vaulted is on a path to achieving both. That's in part because Julia spotted an opportunity to repurpose existing technology, in part because Vaulted has executed extremely well, and in part because Julia herself is a force of nature. The world would be better off with more climate founders like her.

Ransohoff is the head of Public Goods at Stripe, which co-founded Frontier



Lorenzo Salgado Jr. & Ronaldo Salgado

HONORING THEIR FATHER

Ronaldo and Lorenzo Salgado hope to prevent other families from suffering the terrible loss that theirs did this year. On July 7, an ICE officer fatally shot their father Lorenzo Salgado Araujo in their hometown of Houston. Ronaldo, 29, and Lorenzo Jr., 27, immediately put their lives on hold. Even as they mourned alongside their loved ones, the brothers, still grieving, began using their voices to advocate for immigrant rights across the U.S., drawing national attention



Pavel Talankin

COURAGEOUS TEACHER

BY DAVID BORENSTEIN

What do you do when a government you can't accept destroys everything you've built? That was Pavel Talankin's situation. A primary-school teacher in the tiny town of Karabash, Russia, Pavel prided himself on a classroom where all students felt free to be themselves. Then Russia invaded Ukraine, and

to the tragedy and sparking calls for accountability. Together, they have spoken to media, political leaders, and fellow citizens; Ronaldo wants to pursue state legislation that he hopes will protect immigrant communities. They've found purpose by calling for change and remembering their father in his full humanity. "The status of your birth shouldn't determine the outcome of your life," says Lorenzo Jr. He and Ronaldo credit their parents with creating the opportunities they've enjoyed as Americans: "I like to think we're embodiments of the American Dream." —Lucy Feldman

new policies turned teachers like him into propagandists. He felt trapped, with no way out.

That's when Pavel found me. Over the next few years, he worked with my team to film inside his school. When it became too dangerous to send in a crew, Pavel picked up the camera himself, pushing boundaries even though it could have landed him in prison. The result was our film *Mr. Nobody Against Putin*, which won the 2026 Oscar for Best Documentary Feature.

Working with Pavel on the film was exhilarating, nerve-racking, and maybe a bit reckless. But perhaps a bit of recklessness is exactly what we need when our world is crumbling down around us.

Borenstein is an Oscar-winning filmmaker

Kaley Glenn-Mills

STANDING UP TO SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms have long escaped accountability for the harms young users experience. But a series of lawsuits has cut through their defenses. A key bellwether case ended in March, when a Los Angeles jury sided with Kaley Glenn-Mills, 20, who sued a group of tech companies including Meta and Google for building addictive products that fueled her anxiety and depression. Glenn-Mills testified that her addiction to social media began in grade school. Her lawyers argued that this addiction was by design—and that executives put profits ahead of mental-health concerns. Her case became a rallying cry for other parents and children who say they've had similar experiences.

Ultimately, the jury found Meta and Google "acted with malice, oppression, or fraud" and awarded her \$6 million in damages. The tech giants have filed appeals, but social media firms now face a wave of lawsuits over the alleged risks they pose to children. The pressure may finally force them to make different design choices.

—Andrew R. Chow





Shabana Basij-Rasikh

FIGHTING FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION

BY ANGELINE MURIMIRWA

Shabana Basij-Rasikh takes protecting Afghan girls' right to education literally. The co-founder of the School of Leadership, Afghanistan (SOLA), she told me when we met earlier this year that "education is a tool for liberation." Fearless and relentless, she proved her dedication to her students in 2021 when the Taliban returned to power. Shabana moved quickly, burning her students' records to protect them and evacuating all the young people enrolled at the time to Rwanda. SOLA started as a girls' boarding school in Kabul and now operates in exile—the only legal boarding school for Afghan girls in the world. Together with its online academy, the organization currently reaches more than 43,000 students, nurturing the next generation of teachers, doctors, and leaders Afghanistan will need. In 2026, her leadership earned her a prestigious Elevate Prize. Her message to the world is simple: "Afghan women and girls will never give up. Don't look away."

Protecting every girl's right to learn, thrive, and lead should not be exceptional; it should be the most ordinary thing. Until it is, the work continues.

Murimirwa is the CEO of CAMFED

Katherine Dafforn

PROTECTING COASTLINES

BY MICHELLE WU

More than 40% of Boston residents live in neighborhoods at risk of flooding within our children's lifetimes. As sea-level rise continues to threaten coastal communities around the world, professor Katherine Dafforn gives us reason to hope, showing how we can protect vulnerable populations while restoring the health of our oceans. A biologist and the director of Stone Living Lab at UMass Boston, Dafforn uses nature-inspired strategies to prevent flooding, improve water quality, and strengthen biodiversity. Traditional seawalls, often made of smooth concrete, can disrupt coastal ecosystems, so for her Living Seawalls project, Dafforn's team invented textured habitat panels that transform urban shorelines into homes for marine plants and animals. Her team's studies indicate that these panels can increase the number of fish, seaweeds, and invertebrates in the area by up to 36%. They have now been installed across two Boston neighborhoods—and five continents. Our city is greener and more resilient because of Dafforn's leadership. Her work will help other communities continue to thrive.

Wu, a Democrat, is the mayor of Boston



Jane Burston

CLEAN-AIR CHAMPION

BY MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG

When I moved to New York City in the '60s, its skyline was cloaked in smog. The city wasn't alone: around the world, toxic air was largely accepted as a trade-off for economic growth. In recent years, many leaders have called for change—and today, Jane Burston is leading the charge. Her Clean Air Fund pushes for action on air pollution at every level, from grassroots organizing to working with government leaders. Its Breathe Cities partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies and C40 Cities arms municipalities with precision pollution sensors so they can get accurate data, helping them find the best solutions to improve air quality. This year, the initiative expanded to 16 cities. Jane's work is saving lives. It also shows—as we demonstrated in New York City with record-setting improvements to air quality—that improving health, growing the economy, and fighting climate change are part of the same effort.

Bloomberg, a former New York mayor, is the founder of Bloomberg L.P. and Bloomberg Philanthropies

INNOVATORS

Druski

A TRUE CHARACTER

BY MARK WAHLBERG

The first thing we did together was a workout at my house at 4 in the morning for my YouTube series *4AM Club Challenge*. He was not exactly ready to work out, but it was our most popular episode so far—that's how funny he is. He always slips these gems into conversations, especially when he's talking about how ridiculous my lifestyle is. When I try to explain to him why I get up early, he's shocked that my wife is still with me. It's hard to make me laugh, but he's one of the few people who manages to all the time.

In all his different characters—like his outlandish record executive or ultrarich megachurch pastor—he has hints of Eddie Murphy and elements of Will Ferrell. You also see something that transcends parody. He fully embodies those characters.

We're in serious talks about making a comedy together. We could be anything, from some buddy cops to a couple of ambulance-chasing attorneys.

If I could peek into the future to see where he is 10 years from now, I imagine Druski will probably be one of the most powerful guys in the industry.

Wahlberg is an Oscar-nominated actor and producer



Max Jaderberg

DEVELOPING NEW DRUGS

What does gaming have to do with drug development? To Max Jaderberg, quite a lot. Jaderberg spent years pioneering deep learning and reinforcement learning AI models at Google DeepMind that allowed algorithms to successfully play complex games without training. His work demonstrated AI's significant potential, but "it got to the point that if we were cracking all of these impossible problems, we needed to start pointing this effort toward really important problems in humanity," he says.

So in 2021, he helped co-found Isomorphic Labs, spinning it off from DeepMind with the ambitious mission of using these AI models to "solve all diseases." It's not necessarily hubris, says Jaderberg, who believes that AI can "unlock completely novel biological mechanisms due to new understanding and insights from our drug-design engine." That engine focuses on broad biological processes that could underlie a wide range of conditions, such as inflammation and immune responses. The first such AI-supported drugs are currently being tested in animals, but Jaderberg is optimistic that they will prove promising enough to begin testing in people soon. —Alice Park



Hosam Arab

E-COMMERCE FOR EVERYONE

Even in the e-commerce era, many customers in the Middle East have preferred to pay cash on delivery. Hosam Arab saw this firsthand as co-founder of Namshi, a shopping platform he launched in 2011 that is now a leader in online fashion sales in the region. After experimenting with different incentives to spend digitally rather than in cash, Arab realized the main barrier wasn't access to finance, but consumer trust: customers would rather finalize the purchase once their order was complete.

With this insight, in 2019 Arab started Tabby, a buy-now-pay-later platform that has become the Middle East's largest fintech company. Tabby now also supports shopping, payments, and consumer finance, partnering with thousands of international brands. In 2025, the platform was valued at \$4.5 billion.

—Ivan Plis



Alexandra Eala

A SMASH HIT

BY RAFAEL NADAL

Alexandra Eala was the first player I shared a tennis court with after my retirement. One day, she asked whether I felt like hitting with her for a while. For the first time in many months, I picked up a racket and played again.

I've been lucky enough to know Alex since she began her journey at Rafa Nadal Academy, and have closely followed her tremendous career. At just 19, Alex beat three Grand Slam champion players at the 2025 Miami Open. This year, she won the WTA 500 tournament, becoming the first player from the Philippines to break into the world's top 20. And she still has plenty of room to grow. One of her greatest strengths is precisely her ability to listen, learn, and keep improving.

But perhaps more importantly, Alex remains a wonderful person—warm, approachable, and humble. It isn't easy to handle becoming a true phenomenon at such a young age, and she deserves a lot of credit for keeping her feet on the ground. Now, all that remains is to keep enjoying watching her progress.

Nadal is a two-time Olympic gold medalist in tennis





Claire Tabouret

NOTRE-DAME'S NEWEST ARTIST

BY JEAN-MARIE GALLAIS

In recent years, French figurative painter Claire Tabouret has expanded the scope of her practice while remaining faithful to the concerns that have defined her work. She earned the commission to create six new stained-glass windows for Notre-Dame de Paris in 2024, her models and sketches exhibited last year at the Grand Palais, and the final works are due to be installed by the end of 2026. The project marks a significant turning point, bringing her fresh, bright painting into dialogue with the symbolic and historical weight of a cathedral that's one of France's most resonant monuments. Rather than adopting a purely decorative approach, Tabouret conceives of stained glass as a medium through which light, memory, and human presence converge. The strength of her work lies in its emotional candor. Her figures, often suspended between vulnerability and self-possession, resist portraiture's conventional certainties. Animated by a distinct palette and a persistent tension between intimacy and distance, her work reveals a painter unafraid to expose her own doubts, memories, and sensitivities.

Gallais is the curator at the Pinault Collection, which has exhibited Tabouret's work

Tarek Mansour & Luana Lopes Lara

MARKET MASTERMINDS

Tarek Mansour and Luana Lopes Lara met in a class at MIT: she always sat up front and he wanted to learn from her, she says. As they got to know each other through the school's international community—she's from Brazil, he was raised in Lebanon—they eventually collaborated to found a company that would help popularize prediction markets, which had long been discussed in academic circles but never successfully marketed to the public.

The result, Kalshi, is today one of the world's most popular prediction markets. It allows people to wager on things like the future GOP presidential nominee and the price of diesel, and has been extremely accurate at predicting the outcome of events like elections. Lopes Lara and Mansour say Kalshi democratizes a realm formerly available only to Wall Street traders, who could bet on the price of oil or pork through futures trading.

Kalshi has been challenged in court by states like New York and Washington, which accuse it of being an illegal gambling operation—but the company maintains that its business is lawful, and, notably, investors are huge fans. As the company tries to raise more funding, it is now reportedly valued at \$40 billion, nearly double what funders estimated it was worth in May.

—Alana Semuels



Gretchen Goldman

DEFENDING SCIENCE

BY BILL NYE

While getting her undergraduate degree in atmospheric science at Cornell, Gretchen Goldman took a class that highlighted the vital connection between public policy and the health of everyone on Earth. It changed her life. After policy work for the federal government, she received a Ph.D. in environmental engineering. Today, she leads the Union of Concerned Scientists as president and CEO. She is a powerful advocate for science. Even amid a federal funding retreat, Gretchen is fighting to protect research and ensure crucial investigations into the enormous effects of climate change can continue.

Every day, she combats the troubling forces of anti-science with dogged determination. As Gretchen will tell you, "Policy outcomes are better if science and evidence are involved." She works every day to make it so.

Nye is a science communicator



Himesh Patel

EFFORTLESSLY MARVELOUS

BY CHRISTOPHER NOLAN

Perhaps it was our Englishness, but when I first met Himesh for *Tenet* we connected in some effortless, simple manner. He looks at things in a no-nonsense, analytical way—vital for grounding his character even in the most extraordinary situations. I put him in the cockpit of a 747 smashing into a building, in a speedboat on the Amalfi Coast, and he was able to make those things feel real. Relatable. When I was casting Eurylochus for *The Odyssey*, I knew I needed someone who shared Matt Damon's everyman quality, who felt as down-to-earth and accessible as our Odysseus. Eurylochus is in many ways Odysseus' conscience. He represents the bond that's being tested between Odysseus and his men. But the character can't just be a symbol, and Himesh found a human being there. I think he's only just begun showing us what he can do. He plays a supporting character marvelously, but he's an incredible lead. We're going to see more of that.

Nolan is an Oscar-winning filmmaker



Annie Shi

REMARKABLE RESTAURATEUR

BY NATASHA PICKOWICZ

Being a restaurateur in New York City can be grueling,

risky work, but Annie Shi is so naturally disposed to it, so fluidly herself in all that she does, that she makes it look easy, aspirational, artful, and energetic.

Annie—a native New Yorker with the pragmatic good sense and rarefied taste that comes with it—runs four very, very good restaurants in the city. Her places, all unique in their own way, are universally certified hits—a ridiculously impossible feat!—and Lei, her latest, is the one that feels most intrinsically Annie in spirit. Annie is great at weaving

together a lot of nuanced ideas, like Lei's modern, compact dining room and the historic, scuffed street on which it is located; like its chef Patty Lee's delicious, architectural food and Annie's own deep wine program; and like the way this remarkable, unabashedly Chinese restaurant shines within her portfolio of European-inspired restaurants. That's the most Annie move of all.

Pickowicz is a James Beard Award-nominated chef and author

Julian Aguon

STANDING AGAINST RISING SEAS

BY CHRISTIANA FIGUERES

Julian Aguon understands that the law is not only a system of rules. In courageous hands, it can be an instrument of radical transformation.

As a lead counsel to Vanuatu's government in the historic 2025 climate case before the International Court of Justice, Julian helped carry the voices of Pacific Island countries and frontline communities to the world's highest court. The result was extraordinary: a unanimous affirmation that nation-states have legal obligations to protect their people from further climate impacts, and can be held accountable when they fail to do so. Julian helped convert vulnerability into agency and moral clarity into legal consequences. He showed that those standing on the front lines of climate change need not stand powerless before it.

At a time when the world urgently needs courage equal to the crisis, Julian has helped redraw the boundaries of what justice can demand—and what communities can expect.

Figueres, a former executive secretary of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, is a co-founder of Global Optimism



Michael D. Ratner

ENVISIONING NEW VENTURES

BY NEAL MOHAN

Over the years, I've learned a few things about creators. They are inherently entrepreneurial, seeing opportunity where others see only challenges. They sweat the details. They build community. They set the pace of culture.

From the first time I met Michael D. Ratner, it was clear that he is a creator in every sense of the word. He's responsible for a trailblazing entertainment business (OBB Media); one of the most exciting sports-entertainment startups (Fanatics Studios, launched this year); and what my daughters tell me is the most important beauty brand (Rhode, which he co-founded).

Storytelling is at the heart of his work, whether it's Kevin Hart's hilarious interviews in *Cold as Balls*, Hailey Bieber's viral *Who's in My Bathroom* series, or Justin Bieber's surprise win at the Fanatics Games. Michael has a gift for bringing people together and creating spaces for world-class talent to thrive.

Mohan is CEO of YouTube



Yotam Segev

SECURING THE AI ERA

A bad (human) employee can be fired, disciplined, or sent to jail. It's not so with AI agents. If an agent acts recklessly with company data—sharing proprietary code in public, for example—the same deterrents don't apply. As a result, says Yotam Segev, “the mentality of security has to change completely.”

Segev leads Cyera, which creates systems to govern access to a company's sensitive data. The company builds AI-native defense systems so its clients can “keep up with the pace of an AI-native attacker.” Founded in 2021, the company is valued today at \$12 billion—a 24-fold increase from three years prior.

He says he draws inspiration from Tibetan mandala ceremonies, where monks spend days placing grains of colorful sand, only to destroy their creation once it's done. “That mindset of not getting attached to the achievement or the thing you have built—that's the mindset that you have to adopt in technology today in order to win,” he says.

—Tharin Pillay

Olivier Nsengimana

RESTORING HABITATS

BY ELIZABETH WATHUTI

The grey crowned crane is part of Rwanda's natural heritage. But a decade ago, it was on the brink of disappearing. It was estimated that only 300 remained in the wild, threatened by habitat loss and the illegal pet trade. Olivier Nsengimana refused to accept that this bird could vanish.

He founded the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association in 2015 to bring together science, community knowledge, and action to protect the cranes and restore their wetlands. Today, Rwanda's wild crane population stands at 1,438, and the country's

illegal trade in them has been curtailed.

What I find powerful about Olivier's leadership is his understanding that conservation cannot succeed without people. He works alongside communities, creating livelihoods and turning those closest to nature into its strongest guardians.

Supported by the 2025 Whitley Gold Award's £100,000 prize, Olivier is taking this work to other countries in East Africa, including Uganda and Tanzania. His story reminds us that when local leadership is trusted and supported, and communities are at the heart of conservation, recovery is possible.

Wathuti is the founder and CEO of Green Generation Initiative



Mathilde Poyet & Mathieu Groussin

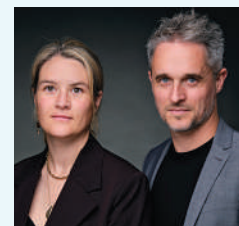
MICROBIOME MAVENS

BY ERIC ALM

Scientists Mathilde Poyet and Mathieu Groussin are racing to save microbial diversity before it disappears. The microbiome—the trillions of bacteria each of us carries—is key to human health, shaping everything from digestion to immunity. As postdocs in my lab at MIT, they kept running into the same obstacle: microbiome science is based almost entirely on samples from industrialized populations. So in 2016 they founded the Global Microbiome Conservancy to collect and preserve gut microbes from remote communities.

Their bet is paying off. They're publishing exciting discoveries and landing in the public eye. What sets their work apart is how it gets done. They ensure remote communities are partners, not research subjects, in a science that finally represents the world it studies. Now, Mathilde and Mathieu have built a one-of-a-kind collection that preserves tens of thousands of bacteria from across the planet as a resource for future generations. Think of it as a biological Noah's ark.

Alm is an MIT professor





Emily Sundberg

SHARP EYE

BY JANICE MIN

I first met Emily Sundberg at a small dinner she was hosting in Los Angeles. A mutual friend in New York had told me that her business newsletter, Feed Me, had become a phenomenon—the kind of thing everyone in media seemed to be reading and discussing. I was surprised, then, to find Emily unassuming, even quiet, without any of the swagger one might expect from a rising media star. I have sometimes described her as a Candace Bushnell for an era preoccupied with money rather than romance.

But that comparison undersells her. Media people are practiced cynics. We chase advertising dollars, overthink our personal brands, and too often shape our work around how it will be received. Emily does the opposite. She writes about what fascinates her, from her own unmistakable point of view, and seems remarkably unmoved by anyone else's expectations or advice. There is no single label that adequately describes Feed Me. That is not a failure of definition. It is the source of its success.

Min is the CEO and editor in chief of Ankler Media

Daniella Kallmeyer

ELEVATING STYLE

BY CHLOE FINEMAN

For a long time, it felt like women in stand-up could only wear jeans and a T-shirt onstage if we wanted to be taken seriously. But Daniella Kallmeyer changed that for me. Her effortless, gorgeous designs made me realize that I could do comedy while looking like Lydia Tár. I felt like the coolest version of myself the first time I wore Kallmeyer, so now I own her Iman Shrunken Blazer in every single color.

Daniella's style is elevated and chic but also so simple. Her clothing is meant for everyone, from weird comedy people to hot lesbian athletes to Michelle Obama, and it's all made to be worn and lived in. I turn into a fiend at Kallmeyer events; everybody looks so good that I end up hiding in the bathroom, adding everything on her website to my cart. Kallmeyer clothes are just really special—exactly like Daniella herself.

Fineman is an actor and comedian



Yang Zhilin

CUTTING-EDGE CEO

Yang Zhilin named his startup Moonshot AI in a nod to Pink Floyd's 1973 masterpiece *The Dark Side of the Moon*—and, following a reported IPO filing that would value the firm at \$50 billion, the track that comes to mind is "Money." Yang has rapidly transformed Moonshot's Kimi series from a popular chatbot into one of China's most-hyped frontier-model challengers. In 2025, Moonshot unveiled Kimi K2, a massive 1 trillion-parameter LLM explicitly engineered for complex coding, tool integration, and agentic intelligence.

A native of Shantou, Guangdong province, Yang maintains that China's AI models have distinct advantages for business adoption, expanding agent ecosystems, and market capital. "We are capable of conducting cutting-edge basic research, and at the same time, we are willing to open-source our core models and key technologies globally, which is something that other countries in the world find difficult to do," Yang told reporters in March.

—Charlie Campbell



Molly Gordon

COMEDY WIZARD

BY CONNOR STORRIE

Part of what makes Molly Gordon such a great actor and filmmaker is her genuine interest in other people. It's one thing to be able to connect with someone based on mutual interests or experiences, but Molly goes beyond that. She wants to learn about your life, your thoughts, your creative processes. She's a deeply curious person. Molly has a real tenacity about her, too—which was clear when we worked together on her upcoming film *Peaked*—but she also has an innate ability to stay playful and open.

Her comedy reminds me of the kinds of movies we grew up watching: stories centered around irreverent characters who you can't help but root for. She brings such clear and fresh perspectives to this industry that I honestly think Molly is some kind of comedy wizard. I'm so excited to keep watching her flourish.

Storrie is an Emmy-nominated actor

AMY HARRITY—THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

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4

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LOUIS VUITTON



IN MY BAG JEREMY ALLEN WHITE. *Le Speedy*