

"All the News  
That's Fit to Print"

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Maria Elena Hernandez attempted to pack but her grandson, Michael, 2, had other ideas. She and her husband were self-deporting.

## From California Back to Mexico, but on Their Own Terms

By ORLANDO MAYORQUÍN

BLOOMINGTON, Calif. — Enrique Castillejos and his wife stopped at a Winchell's Donut House. It was part of their after-church routine on Friday nights.

That evening's sermon had been about finding peace in God in turbulent times, and they felt it spoke directly to them. Enrique, 63, and his wife, Maria Elena Hernandez, 55, were undocumented immigrants. Like millions of others in Southern California, they had been looking over their shoul-

ders as federal agents conducted immigration sweeps.

Freedom, they felt, had become impossible in the land of the free. They had made a decision: Leave America and move back to Mexico.

The process has the sterile, bureaucratic name of self-deportation. For Enrique and Maria Elena, it resembled a long, slow-motion goodbye. It took an emotional, spiritual and logistical toll on everyone around them, including their three children and two grandchildren. They had to decide what to do with their old, beloved

### A Long Goodbye After 30 Years in the U.S.

dog and their trucking business. They had to suddenly cut ties with their church and their neighbors. Visitors bearing gifts dropped by unannounced.

Maria Elena had suggested to Enrique that he leave for Mexico first, while she waited for her broken foot to heal. "No," she recalled Enrique telling her. "Together we came and together we go."

Their decision to go came long before the Trump administration's crackdown in Minneapolis, and long before federal operations intensified in their own San Bernardino County neighborhood. Returning to Mexico had always been in the cards. But they had wanted to go on their own terms, retiring there someday. The Trump administration's crackdown had prompted them to make that "someday" now.

The couple's departure hit the family hard. They watch the news now with conflicting emotions, as

Continued on Page 18

## Do Americans Want to Party Like It's 1976?

By STEVEN KURZ

Garland Pollard was 11 in 1976, the year the United States celebrated its 200th birthday, and was living in Virginia Beach with his parents.

"We were a Nixon family," Mr. Pollard said. "I remember all the dinner party talk about Watergate. There were race riots at that time. It was pretty feisty — there were arguments at the dinner table."

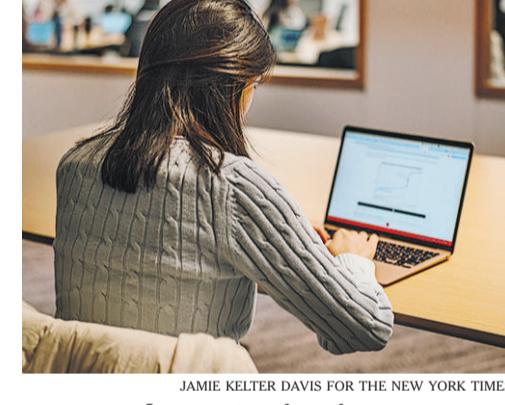
Yet as Mr. Pollard, 60, wrote in an editorial last summer in Boca Beacon, the Florida newspaper he edits, in that bicentennial year "there was a wave of patriotism that came seemingly out of nowhere."

This time around, as America commemorates its 250th anniversary, there will be a government-sponsored mixed martial arts bout on the White House lawn and plenty of debate about what it means to celebrate the birth of a nation that finds itself arguably more divided than it was in 1976.

Final plans for the biggest celebrations, including a nationwide block party this summer, are coming together amid protests against federal agents in U.S. cities and international unease over President Trump's stated desire to take control of Greenland. In short: Are Americans in the mood to celebrate the semiquincentennial?

"In the back of my mind, that question does come up," said Rosie Rios, the chair of the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission, a nonpartisan group that has been charged by Congress to plan festivities under the banner Amer-

Continued on Page 20



WISCONSIN International students stay away.



WASHINGTON Tariffs stall careers at a port.



ALASKA A frontier town sees a global future.



VERMONT Fewer Canadians visit and shop.

## Remaking America

When President Trump vowed a "tide of change" in his Inaugural Address last year, he was not exaggerating.

One year in, those changes are everywhere, often turbulent and polarizing, manifestations of the sharp right turn that Mr. Trump promised for the country and the world.

The president has declared that his power is constrained only by his "own morality."

That sentiment has made itself felt in the aggressive immigration enforcement in Minneapolis and other cities, which has led to deaths.

The New York Times found evidence of change, welcome and not, in all 50 states and in Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. The list is not complete, by any means.

Then again, Mr. Trump says that he is far from finished.

SPECIAL SECTION

## INTERNATIONAL 4-11

### Trump Warns Iran, Again

The president threatens more strikes against the regime, but could be risking a regional war. News Analysis. PAGE 14

## NATIONAL 12-22

### Washington Post C.E.O. Quits

The departure of Will Lewis, who was also the newspaper's publisher during a stormy tenure, came days after 30 percent of the staff was cut. PAGE 14

### A Fake Post Spreads Online

The forgery appeared to describe President Trump's rationale for deleting a racist video that he had shared. PAGE 22



SUPER BOWL SPECIAL SECTION

### Stars, Rising and Redeemed

Drake Maye, 23, leads the Patriots against the Seahawks' Sam Darnold, who has gone from a bust to a beast.

## SUNDAY STYLES

### A New Fashion Lineage

With the help of nieces, the New York designer Anna Sui is steering her 45-year-old label into the future. PAGE 4

### Keeping Shoppers in Mind

Saks Fifth Avenue's bankruptcy filing revives debates over how department stores can regain their luster. PAGE 1

## ARTS & LEISURE

### All Eyes Are on Bad Bunny

Amid harsh rhetoric from the White House, the Puerto Rican superstar plans to take the stage at the Super Bowl with a message of unity. PAGE 8



METROPOLITAN

### A Diagnosis, Then a Plan

What if you really did live every day as if it were your last? That was Brian Cahill's strategy after he was told he had three to five years to live. PAGE 1

## SUNDAY OPINION

### Tressie McMillan Cottom

PAGE 8

## SUNDAY BUSINESS

### The W.N.B.A. Is Their Model

The race to create and promote the next major women's professional sport has begun, and there are two women's volleyball leagues battling to be the last one standing. And playing. PAGE 6

### The New Fabio Is Claude

The romance industry, which is often at the vanguard of technological change, is rapidly adopting A.I. to write its stories. Not everyone, however, is in love with the idea. PAGE 1



## THE WEATHER

Today, breezy, very cold, plenty of sunshine, high 17. Tonight, clear, bitter cold, low 9. Tomorrow, not quite as cold, some sunshine, high 29. Weather map appears on Page 26.

## CARTELS FIRE OFF DEADLY ROUNDS PRODUCED IN U.S.

## SMUGGLED TO MEXICO

### Downing Choppers With Ammunition Made at Federal Site

This article is by Ben Dooley, Isabella Cota and Emiliano Rodriguez Mega.

VILLA UNIÓN, Mexico — On the morning of Nov. 30, 2019, a convoy of pickup trucks carrying men armed with a heavy machine gun and powerful .50-caliber rifles entered the Mexican town of Villa Unión and opened fire.

The men had been sent on a mission of intimidation: They planned to set fire to the town hall. Their superior firepower pinned down state and local police officers as they waited for military reinforcements. Terrorized residents scrambled to take cover from the hail of bullets.

The smell of smoke filled the streets and spent casings covered the ground like "fallen leaves," said Luis Manzano, a Mexican journalist who drove into town during the shooting. But his most vivid memory was the thunder of .50-caliber guns. The "ground trembled" as they fired, he said. "I had never experienced anything like that."

The military drove off the assailants. In the end, four police officers, two civilians and 19 cartel members were killed. Afterward, as investigators collected evidence from the scene, they gathered at least 45 .50-caliber casings stamped with the initials "L.C."

The letters stood for the Lake City Army Ammunition Plant, a sprawling facility just outside Kansas City, Mo., that is owned by the U.S. government and is the largest manufacturer of rifle rounds used by the American military.

It has also been a major supplier of ammunition for American consumers, including .50-caliber cartridges. These powerful rounds — as big as a medium-sized cigar and designed to be used by the military to destroy vehicles and light aircraft — are cur-

Continued on Page 10

## Epstein Letters On the Wealthy Hint at Secrets

### Seeking Leverage From Alleged 'Illicit Trysts'

This article is by Steve Eder, Jessica Silver-Greenberg and Matthew Goldstein.

Jeffrey Epstein, the notorious sex offender, was drafting a letter to Leslie Wexner, the billionaire retail tycoon who had once been his main financial benefactor. Years after their acrimonious split in 2007, Mr. Epstein was contemplating the rekindling of that relationship, and he apparently wanted to remind Mr. Wexner of what he said was their shared history.

"You and I had 'gang stuff' for over 15 years," Mr. Epstein wrote in a draft of the letter, which was included in the millions of pages of Epstein-related documents that the Justice Department released late last month. He noted that "I owe a great debt to you, as frankly you owe to me." He added that he had "no intention of divulging any confidence of ours."

It is not clear what Mr. Epstein was hinting at or whether he even sent the undated letter, which was addressed to "Les." Mr. Wexner — the source of hundreds of millions of dollars of Mr. Epstein's wealth — has not been charged with wrongdoing.

But the letter fit into a broad pattern in which Mr. Epstein toyed with the idea of telling his past, present and potential financial sponsors that he knew — and was keeping quiet about — their supposed secrets. The messages, written with stray punctuation and spelling errors, veered from menacing to sentimental.

There was the 2013 email that Mr. Epstein sent to himself about the billionaire Bill Gates. The email rattled off the "morally inappropriate" work supposedly done for Mr. Gates, including procuring antibiotics "to deal with consequences of sex with Russian girls" and arranging "illicit trysts, with married women." It is not clear whether the allegations are true, why Mr. Epstein drafted the email or whether it was ever sent to Mr. Gates.

There were the dozens of messages that Mr. Epstein sent to Leon Black, the private equity bil-

Continued on Page 14

## They're Not Alone in Copying Thoreau's Cabin in the Woods

By DORIE CHEVLEN

Jasper and Satchel Sieniewicz can't believe it was a one-man job.

As children, their father read to them from Henry David Thoreau's "Walden," which includes lengthy descriptions of Thoreau building his cabin at the eponymous pond in Concord, Mass., using hand tools to form beams from fallen timber and upcycling wood from a railroad worker's shanty.

All of it he did alone except for raising the frame with a few friends, though even this Thoreau qualifies as "rather to improve so good an occasion for neighborliness than from any necessity."

After building a full-scale replica of Thoreau's cabin in the woods behind their family's vacation home in Maine, the brothers don't buy it. Even using a saw mill and power tools, it took them three summers of labor, on and off between school and work beginning the first summer of the pandemic, plus the help of their father, Tom Sieniewicz. Thoreau was living in his cabin in under three months.

"There is no way that he did it by himself in the time period that he said it was done," said Jasper, now 23.

No registry tallies how many people have made replicas of



SEBASTIAN SIADECKI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES Jim and Rachel Van Eerden took some liberties with their Thoreau-inspired cabin.

Thoreau's cabin, but they exist across the country, built for private use, for writers' retreats, for academic purposes and as Airbnb rentals. To aid the projects, The Thoreau Society started selling blueprints of the 10-by-15-foot cabin at its gift shop about seven years ago. And at the Sam Beauford Woodworking Institute in Adrian, Mich., you can sign up for a four-week "Walden Cabin series," which teaches all the skills necessary to make your own cabin.

Continued on Page 16

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