Biden’s Visit Bodes Ill for Israel

Israel’s caretaker government is unequal to the strategic challenges posed by Team Obama’s policy of punishing friends and rewarding enemies.

BY TONY BADRAN

Way back during the Napoleonic era, the ace Austrian diplomat Klemens von Metternich once quipped that “when France sneezes, the whole of Europe catches a cold.” For allies and clients of the United States, Metternich’s wit is a useful guide to navigating the whims of a disoriented hyperpower that appears to have gone down an Alice in Wonderland-type rabbit hole where the police must be abolished to ensure the safety of poor neighborhoods, men celebrate their victories in women’s sports, and economic progress is achieved by shipping your entire manufacturing base off to your supposed great-power rival in China. Yet since even a hyperpower run by the Mad Hatter is still a hyperpower, it is best to tread carefully.

America’s Alice in Wonderland foreign policy carries special dangers for watchful allies and client states, who must balance their concern for their own citizens against the folly of alienating the most powerful country on the planet. The new watchwords of American Middle East policy—“de-pressurization,” “balance,” and “integration”—signal that America is no longer interested in pursuing the time-honored path of rewarding friends and punishing enemies. Rather, wise American policy consists of downgrading friends while integrating enemies into the trade and security structures they seek to destroy, in order to achieve a more “balanced” policy.

Sound nuts? It is. But when President Joe Biden schedules his first official visit to your country, you bend over backwards to accommodate your superpower ally and patron. In pre-visit preparations, you strive mightily to paper over areas of disagreement that cause friction. If your American guest is determined to amp up the friction, you answer with a smile during the joint presser, offer noncommittal statements, and move on. Such is the Israeli playbook for Biden’s visit, and the Saudi playbook, too. It’s worked before.

Of course, it is wishful thinking by the leadership of both countries if they imagine the Biden visit to be this kind of run-of-the-mill diplomatic episode. Relations during the three terms of Barack Obama have been chilly if not outright hostile. Israel and Team Obama have been directly at odds on the critical issue of Iran—which is to say, on the U.S. posture in the region as Obama reimagined and realigned it, in order to...
promote “balance” between America’s friends and its Iranian foes. Biden has pronounced the Saudis to be “pariahs.”

The leaders of the current Israeli government had defined themselves in terms of banishing the coldness in Israel’s relationship with the Obama team, which they blamed on former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But theirs is now a caretaker government, having lost the majority in the Knesset. Prime Minister Yair Lapid will serve for the next four months, until new elections take place. The weakness of Israel’s caretaker government, combined with the delusional belief that Netanyahu was the root of all friction in the relationship with the United States, is a recipe for getting slapped around by a White House team that has been as short on successes as it is long on pseudo-moralistic phraseology.

Biden’s trip to Saudi Arabia on Friday is first and foremost about bringing down high gasoline prices that are likely to hurt the Democrats in November. However, given how hostility to Saudi Arabia became a plank of Team Obama’s realignment doctrine, Biden has been forced to go to comical lengths to justify making the trip to the kingdom while distancing himself from the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, the country’s de facto ruler.

A recent Washington Post op-ed published under Biden’s name took credit for the decisions already made by Saudi Arabia and Israel to deepen and publicize their bilateral ties, which flourished in response to Obama’s effort to downgrade both U.S. allies in favor of closer ties with Tehran. True to form, the op-ed never once mentions the words “Abraham Accords,” an achievement that took place on the Trump administration’s watch and is therefore anathema—and which was designed in part as a regional hedge by Israel and the Gulf States against America’s efforts to “integrate” and “balance” the region. The word “integrate” appears in Biden’s op-ed no less than three times, providing a clear signal of where the administration’s priorities lie.

In order to achieve those priorities, it is necessary to set the Saudis and Israelis back on their heels and keep their budding alliance in check. And while the Saudis make a poor punching bag at the moment, given that the United States is playing the role of a supplicant in Jeddah in order to bring down prices at the pump, Israel is, politically speaking, the local weakling, ready to be punched.

The White House set the stage for Biden’s trip by sticking it to Israel over the death of Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh—despite the fact that an American-led forensic examination of the bullet that killed her could not determine who fired it. Nor was the bullet of a type that is used by snipers. In other words, there continues to be zero evidence that Abu Akleh’s death was anything other than the kind of accident of which the United States itself is regularly and depressingly guilty. To further fan the flames, Abu Akleh’s family was invited to Washington to meet personally with Secretary of State Antony Blinken—an honor not afforded to the families of the seven Afghan children murdered by a U.S. drone strike in August as the administration implemented its shambolic withdrawal.

It could be argued this is petty stuff—to be swallowed out of necessity with only limited heartburn. Other steps on Biden’s agenda while in Israel, however, are more serious. The U.S. president, according to an Axios report, “will announce $100 million in aid to Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem,” and refused to allow Israeli officials to accompany him on his trip to the hospitals, which are located within Israel’s capital.

The administration then “asked Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar to match the U.S. aid to the hospitals” (the Saudis are said not to have committed). Why? Two unnamed U.S. officials explained that the administration wants Saudi Arabia and the UAE to improve their relations with the Palestinian Authority, and “that the normalization process among Israel and Arab states will also benefit the Palestinians.” In other words, the United States is using the Palestinians as a device to disrupt warming relations between the Gulf States and Israel, not to advance that relationship. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, a former Hillary Clinton aide who became a key messenger between the Obama White House and Iran, then publicly stated the American desire to reopen a U.S. consulate in East Jerusalem, over the previously stated objections of his Israeli hosts. (White House spokesperson John Kirby later tried to walk back Sullivan’s remarks.)

In other words, the Biden administration is using its trip to the region not to draw closer to Israel, or to enhance the Israeli relationship with the Saudis, but to disrupt the budding alliance between Israel and the Gulf States, while causing their hosts as much heartburn as possible. Strategically, the White House is attempting to bind the Saudis and the
UAE to Obama’s adoption of Palestinian maximalism and the “1967 lines” framework through orchestrating the passage of U.N. Security Council resolution 2334—thereby undercutting the Abraham Accords in favor of the failed “peace process” paradigm.

The Palestinians are not the only instrument the Biden administration is using to ram things down Israel’s throat during his visit. In keeping with the overall realignment, the administration is pushing the caretaker Israeli government to sign a maritime border deal with Hezbollah-controlled Lebanon. The explicit purpose of this deal was always to have Lebanon make money and, in the words of State Department senior adviser for energy security, Amos Hochstein, the Biden envoy who is leading the mediation effort, to “invest” in “southern Lebanon.”

In recent days, Israel shot down drones that Hezbollah launched at the offshore Karish gas rig in Israeli waters, after months of threats. Hezbollah, which has been the Biden administration’s indirect interlocutor in the maritime border talks, demanded along with the Lebanese government that Lebanon be granted a prospective gas field that extends beyond Lebanon’s claimed maritime line—and that Israel halt operations at the Karish rig until Lebanon could be allowed to begin exploring its own as-yet-unproven reserves. The threats and their implementation served as an assist to Hochstein’s push for the Israelis to sign a deal by September. The administration also reportedly pressed Israel not to make any escalatory responses to Hezbollah’s drone operation and instead push ahead with concluding the deal, thus further legitimizing the terror group’s control of official Lebanese policy.

Sure enough, Israeli officials, including the caretaker prime minister and defense minister, amplified the administration’s messaging about the critical importance of “stabilizing” Lebanon by facilitating its imagined emergence as “an exporter of gas.” Hezbollah was supposedly acting against the Lebanese government and “undermining” the efforts to reach a deal on the maritime border, which would allow Lebanon to benefit from offshore gas production. The IDF reportedly advised the caretaker government to stop the talks in light of Hezbollah’s attack. The government refused. Why? Because, as Israel’s Channel 12 reported, “there ‘may’ be some additional progress during U.S. President Joe Biden’s trip to the region.”

There are serious ramifications to the U.S.-Lebanese gas initiative, and how the Israeli government has responded to it, that go beyond the maritime border issue. It’s not just that the Biden administration specifically leveraged Hezbollah threats and operations to pressure Israel to sign a deal designed to benefit the terror group, which controls the Lebanese puppet state, militarily and politically. It’s also that the Israeli government adopted Washington’s fictitious distinction between Hezbollah and Lebanon, which American officials use as a fig leaf to promote investment in a country run by an Iranian terrorist army. As Hochstein put it, “I see Lebanon as a country. I don’t think of Lebanon as—Hizballah as Lebanon … This U.S. administration fully supports Lebanon.”

See, we’re not investing in Hezbollah—which dominates Lebanon and which, by virtue of its position in government and parliament, legally is a beneficiary of its official budget. We’re investing in Lebanon, which is this other thing, totally separate from and unrelated to Hezbollah. As a matter of fact, not only does our investment in Lebanon not benefit Hezbollah, it also helps weaken it!

Uh, right. That the hapless Israeli government agrees with this Mad Hatter gibberish is implicit in its contention that Hezbollah—which has been directing the maritime border negotiations since day one—is attempting to “undermine” the talks. Hence, by seeing these talks through to the finish line, we’re scoring a serious blow against Hezbollah, which will no doubt be devastated once investments pour into “southern Lebanon,” and once it gets its cut of future gas revenues.

Having Iran and Hezbollah become players in eastern Mediterranean energy is clearly not an Israeli interest. Nor is succumbing to Hezbollah blackmail, leveraged against Israel by the United States, a positive precedent. The same could be said about the possible repercussions this mess might have on Israel’s ability to conduct operations in Lebanon, which, lest we forget in the midst of all the excitement about investments, in no way resembles even a seminormal country. Lebanon is an Iranian forward missile base, where Hezbollah and the IRGC are upgrading the precision of their projectiles aimed at Israel. Meanwhile, the U.S. administration brokering these talks with Hezbollah-led Lebanon is the same one looking to enter a deal with Iran that licenses its nuclear program and enriches it with hundreds of billions of dollars.

It’s tricky to refuse the United States if you’re an ally or a client. And yes, Israel is caught between a rock and hard place. But Israel shouldn’t be tripping itself up. On key matters like Jerusalem, its independent alliance with the Gulf States, and its security environment in Lebanon, Israel’s inability to say no to America is a strategic disaster of the country’s own making. Look at the Saudis, for example. Team Biden has been pressuring them for almost two years to underwrite the “institutions” of Hezbollah-land and to pump cash into Lebanon. So far, the Saudis have admirably brushed them off.

One of the reasons for the success of the Abraham Accords was Israel’s refusal to kowtow to the United States on Iran—even as the nuclear deal was explicitly billed as the crown jewel of Obama’s personal legacy. If Netanyahu’s 2015 speech to Congress earned him enemies in the Democratic Party in Washington, it earned Israel friends in the Gulf. Israel is now sending the region the opposite message.

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**SPORTS**

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Who Really Benefits From the First Amendment?

The purpose of free speech is to give the marginalized an escape hatch from the status quo, not to entrench political power

BY NADINE STROSSEN

As a political liberal and civil liberties crusader since my student days in the 1960s and ’70s, I have long defended freedom of speech across the ideological spectrum. I continue to adhere to the longstanding liberal principle that Evelyn Beatrice Hall famously formulated in her 1906 biography of Voltaire, and which the U.S. Supreme Court has consistently enforced since the 1960s as the “viewpoint neutrality principle”: “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” Or, as Oscar Wilde spun it: “I may not agree with you, but I will defend to the death your right to make an ass of yourself.”

Liberals like me have long assumed that political and classical liberalism go hand-in-hand, and that for those of us on the political left, support for free speech—even for “the thought that we hate,” in Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes’ famous phrase—is a defining value, or at least a more important value than it is for those on the right. After all, former Supreme Court Justice William Brennan, arguably the court’s most influential liberal in modern history, hailed the viewpoint neutrality principle as the First Amendment’s “bedrock.”

Yet in recent times, as we’re all well aware by now, this core tenet has come under heavy fire from left-leaning individuals and groups, including student activists, academics, journalists, cultural leaders, and Democratic politicians, many of whom have advanced the argument that words can be a form of violence itself. The question is: What accounts for this shift? Why has the political and cultural left in America—of which I understand this magazine to see (or have seen) itself as a part—appeared to turn so decisively against the First Amendment?

Perhaps it’s best to begin by considering whether this is such a new phenomenon after all. In 1992, the liberal journalist Nat Hentoff, a longtime Village Voice columnist, wrote the aptly titled book Free Speech for Me—But Not for Thee: How the American Left and Right Relentlessly Censor Each Other, demonstrating that the differences between the American left and right concerning free speech were almost never over whether speech should be censored, but only about which speech should be censored. Hentoff’s book resonated deeply with me at the time, and has continued to do so, since it reflects my own long-standing experience in various leadership roles at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

In 1977-78, when the ACLU defended the free speech rights of neo-Nazis in Skokie, Illinois, whose population included many Holocaust survivors, our position was opposed in the courts by another organization that had typically been our ally: the Anti-Defamation League. Even a full 15% of ACLU members at the time resigned their membership in protest. Also in the late 1970s, so-called “radical feminists” began advocating government restrictions on “pornography,” the term they used for sexual expression that is “demeaning” or “degrading” to women.

Starting in the 1980s, many liberals sought to restrict several types of controversial language in popular media, stressing child-protection rationales. Tipper Gore, for example—then-wife of then-Sen. Al Gore, D-Tenn., and mother to an 11-year-old daughter who had acquired a copy of Prince’s Purple Rain— spearheaded regulation of music lyrics that were deemed violent or sexist, leading to the now-ubiquitous Parental Advisory labels known as “Tipper Stickers.” Democratic lawmakers around this time also sponsored measures to restrict depictions of violence on television, and soon after access to the internet became widespread, the Clinton administration championed a law that criminalized “indecent” and “patently offensive” online expression. In 1997, after the “conservative” Rehnquist court overturned these key provisions of the 1996 Communications Decency Act on First Amendment grounds, the prominent First Amendment lawyer Floyd Abrams wrote a blistering New York Times Magazine article titled “Clinton vs. the First Amendment,” concluding that “it has become the norm, not the exception, for Clinton Administration lawyers to find themselves minimizing First Amendment interests and defending laws or policies that maximize threats to free expression.”

Liberal advocacy of wide-ranging restrictions on expression about sex or gender on the rationale that it constitutes “sexual harassment” is another old story. Likewise, since the 1980s, many liberals have advocated campus “hate speech codes” that are invariably too broad, punishing and chilling all
manner of expression about various categories of personal and group identity. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, many liberals in government and civil society have supported restrictions on “extremist” or “terrorist” speech, whose inevitably vague contours have actually had negative human rights repercussions, including by making it difficult for human rights activists to accurately document terrorist atrocities.

Nor has it been the case that the more politically liberal an administration is, the more it respects the freedom of the press, as indicated by the Clinton administration’s record. In 2013, in response to “revelations that the Obama Justice Department had secretly seized the phone records of a large number of journalists for The Associated Press” and “the chilling effect of the Obama administration’s leak investigations—including the ramped-up criminal prosecution of those who provide information to the press,” then-Public Editor of The New York Times Margaret Sullivan charged the Obama administration with “unprecedented attacks on a free press.”

Given this history—which of course is the mirror image of an equally extensive history on the political right—should we be surprised that today’s political left is determined to censor “disinformation,” “extremism,” and “hate,” and to advance the belief that offensive language is the same as not only violent language, but also physical violence?

Let’s examine the “words are violence” phenomenon a little more closely, as it appears to be increasing in salience and influence on the left, perhaps posing even more of a threat to a robust free speech culture than right-wing attempts to shut down speech that conservatives deem “hateful” to, for example, American history, traditional values, or certain religious holidays. While these attacks from the right are generally reflected in government policies, which are therefore vulnerable to First Amendment challenges, the cultural pressures that shape—and limit—discourse in academia, journalism, and other key private sector institutions are not subject to First Amendment constraints.

In the 1980s, as I said, left-leaning professors and students on U.S. college campuses launched the movement for campus hate speech codes, which sought to punish individually targeted racist slurs. Similarly, in the same time period, “radical feminists” sought to legally equate the depiction of sexual violence—for example, in works of art and journalism—with real sexual violence in the physical world. In the intervening decades, these initiatives have expanded in both support and scope. Today, accusations of “hate speech” and “violent speech” shut down even good-faith discussions of public policy options that are deemed inconsistent with the perceived consensus at that moment, even if such “consensus” is neither broadly held nor static. Worse yet, individuals who are accused of engaging in such expression have been fired from positions in culturally influential fields such as academia, journalism, and publishing, suppressing their speech across the board with literally incalculable chilling impacts on the speech of countless others.

Even though courts have consistently enforced the cardinal “viewpoint neutrality principle” to bar official suppression of ideas solely on the ground that any listeners consider them hateful or violent, powerful private sector forces—including social media mobs—have been increasingly successful in suppressing disfavored ideas by invoking the false and dangerous equation between free expression and physical violence. This strategy has prevailed on many college campuses, where free speech is especially important, given the special truth-seeking and educational missions of universities. Surveys consistently show that substantial majorities of American college students and faculty members now engage in self-censorship across a spectrum of important political topics, both in the classroom and in social settings, to avoid the risk of retaliation.

Because many campus communities skew overwhelmingly liberal or progressive, and because progressive views tend to disproportionately dominate fields that favor workers with academic degrees, self-censorship is particularly acute among nonprogressives: conservatives, libertarians, moderates, the politically indifferent, and even “old-style” liberals. Empirical evidence confirms, moreover, that fears of retaliation are rational, given numerous documented instances of retaliatory measures ranging from social ostracism, to online and in-person bullying, to the denial of extracurricular leadership positions, recommendation letters, and career opportunities. Many left-leaning members of campus communities explicitly admit (or boast) that they would deny employment and other professional opportunities to academics with conservative views about public policy issues.

Beyond encouraging self-censorship, much of the political left has also embraced more coercive modes of censorship. Contrary to important free speech principles, the “heckler’s veto” has become a favored tool for suppressing disfavored ideas or expression in many campus contexts, ranging from student newspapers to guest speaker presentations.

When a speaker conveys ideas that some audience members find offensive, no rights have been violated. Nor have any rights been violated when some audience members nondisruptively protest by conveying ideas that are offensive to the speaker and to other audience members. But disruptive protests, which effectively veto the event, violate
both the speaker’s right to convey information and ideas and the listeners’ right to receive them.

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), on whose Advisory Board I serve, recently published a compilation of reported campus cancellation incidents targeting faculty members between 2015 and 2021. FIRE documented a total of 563 attempts to sanction faculty members for expression that was constitutionally protected but controversial in the campus community. In a full two-thirds of these cases, the faculty member was subject to some form of punishment; in one-fifth of cases the faculty member was fired; and most alarmingly, 30 tenured professors were fired for constitutionally protected speech. Of the total number of documented incidents, FIRE reports that 345 (61%) involved the expression of views that were suppressed by individuals and groups to the left of the targeted faculty member. Notably, the evidence indicated that a significant number of these 345 incidents may well have targeted liberal views espoused by liberal professors, which were attacked by campus factions even further to the left. As the FIRE report stated: “[W]e think a significant number of these incidents involve a scholar who identifies as ‘somewhat’ or ‘slightly’ liberal being targeted by those who identify as ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ liberal.” Furthermore, a substantial number of the total documented incidents—202, or 35%—targeted the expression of views that were suppressed by those to the right of the targeted faculty member.

People concerned about such developments are frequently told that “cancel culture isn’t real,” or at least that it is grossly exaggerated. The FIRE numbers refute these claims while helpfully underscoring that the political left has a substantial monopoly on “cancel culture” than is typically understood. This evidence demonstrates that the viewpoint neutrality principle continues to serve as an essential safeguard for all people and persuasions, including those on the left. Contrary to prevalent left-leaning rhetoric, free speech is far more than a right-wing fig leaf for “hate” or “violence,” even if in certain cases it might be opportunistically exploited as such.

Every movement now considered “progressive”—abolition, women’s suffrage, gender equality, reproductive freedom, labor rights, social democracy, civil rights, opposition to war, LGBTQ+ rights—was at one time supported only by a minority, and viewed as dangerous or worse. Unsurprisingly, many of these movements only began to flourish and progress toward the previously unattainable goal of majority consensus after the Supreme Court started to strongly enforce the free speech guarantee (including the core viewpoint neutrality principle) in the second half of the 20th century. The lesson many on the left seem to have forgotten is that in a democracy, there is a constant danger that minority groups—whether defined by identity, ideology, or otherwise—will be subject to “the tyranny of the majority.” The specific purpose of the Bill of Rights, including the First Amendment’s free speech guarantee, is to ensure that the majority cannot deny basic rights to any minority, no matter how small or unpopular. Powerful people and popular ideas don’t need First Amendment protections; marginalized people and unpopular ideas do. The resulting beneficiaries are not only the exponents of ideas that are unpopular in their time and place, but also our overall society. As George Bernard Shaw observed more generally, “All great truths begin as blasphemies.”

Leaders of every equal rights movement in U.S. history have testified to the essential role that free speech played in advancing their cause. In 1860, Frederick Douglass famously declared that “Slavery cannot abide free speech. Five years of its exercise would banish the auction block and break every chain in the South.” The great civil rights champion and longtime Georgia Congressman John Lewis memorably commented that “Without freedom of speech, the Civil Rights Movement would have been a bird without wings.” In 1919, law professor Dale Carpenter, a prominent champion of LGBTQ+ rights, wrote that “[T]he First Amendment created gay America … [G]ay cultural and political institutions … would have been swept away in the absence of a strong and particularly libertarian First Amendment. No other [constitutional right] helped us more.”

To this day, advocates for equal rights and social justice are subject to censorial measures that seek to stifle their free expression. Government officials in the United States and other Western democracies have been enforcing many measures to curb the free association rights of peaceful protesters, and police have deployed speech-suppressive tactics, including unjustified force and arrests. Multiple U.S. states have imposed restrictions on K-12 and campus curricula concerning race and gender, and public schools and libraries have been subject to record levels of book bans—in many cases targeting books by and about Black and LGBTQ+ Americans. Fortunately, free speech advocates have been mounting strong legal challenges to these repressive measures, but this is only thanks to the same robust free speech principles that also protect the expressive rights of people with opposing views.

It should therefore go without saying that any argument in favor of censorship, in addition to being questionable on the basis of principle, is strategically unwise. Every pro-censorship argument currently being made by the left and the right can and will be coopted by the other side once it has or regains sufficient power. In the 1980s, right-wing crusaders against sexual expression they viewed as inconsistent with “traditional family values”—including speech in favor of feminism, reproductive freedom, and LGBTQ+ rights—opportunistically parroted the rhetoric of the radical anti-pornography feminists who were also active at that time; the Meese Pornography Commission under President Ronald Reagan bolstered its calls to censor sexual expression by invoking the radical feminists’ claims that certain sexual...
expression leads to discrimination and violence against women. Today, conservative Republican school boards, state legislatures, and governors are enacting laws that ban teaching about such vital topics as race and gender on the grounds that it might be divisive or make students uncomfortable. What progressive in good conscience could not recognize that this censorial rhetoric and rationale has deep roots in their own movement?

Cherian George, a fellow free speech scholar and advocate who was born in Singapore and teaches in Hong Kong, has discussed with me what he considers the “bizarre” phenomenon of “the American left’s eagerness to suppress or punish speech.” In 2018, after he spent three months teaching a seminar on censorship to Ph.D. students at the University of Pennsylvania, George’s conclusion was that members of “the American left...take the country’s freedoms for granted.” As he commented:

In the activist circles that I inhabit in Asia, the left (including feminists and those fighting for minority rights) is solidly aligned with free speech advocates, because they know from experience that whenever speech is restricted, they suffer disproportionately. Perhaps the American left feel they can afford to be blasé, even reckless, about free speech, because they know that when they really need it, the First Amendment will be there for them. It’s a risk that progressives in most of the rest of the world can’t afford to take.

Given the assaults against free speech that progressives suffer even in America, this is a risk they can’t afford to take either.

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**NEWS**

The Battle for the Soul of Miami

Magic City has changed since the tech bros made landfall—but not in the ways you think

**BY ALEX PEREZ**

On Aug. 24, 1992, just after 5 a.m., Hurricane Andrew made landfall in Miami-Dade County. I was 9 at the time, and along with immediate and extended family, I was holed up at my paternal grandparents’ home, the electric atmosphere akin to a Nochebuena party. I remember my father and grandfather venturing outside during the eye and surveying the damage. I also remember the sheer relief when the wind died down and the greatest relief of all when I was finally allowed to go outside and saw that our neighborhood had mostly been spared.

The days that followed revealed the utter devastation that Andrew had caused, and even if the city has long since been rebuilt, the specter of Andrew remains. Simply say the name Andrew, and anyone who was around in ’92 will regale you with a wild tale or two of their hurricane experience.

As much as Miami’s multicultural populace and the loosey-goosey tropical lifestyle they favor shapes the city, it is hurricane season, which stretches from June through November, that sets the tone. For six months of the year, Miamians watch as hurricanes form off the coast of Africa and set out on their predictable march toward the Magic City, terrorizing the Antilles and other islands along the way.

Every year we’re faced with a close call or two, but in especially unlucky seasons, a Katrina or a Wilma will swing through and remind us of Andrew. This yearly submission to the tropics—and the understanding that the next big one, no matter how much we try to will it away, is preordained—is a quintessential Miami experience. Until you’ve been through it—the panic buying, the hanging on every word of delirious weathermen, the inevitable winds and rains and days without power—you’re not a Miamian. But in the last year, as a new type of tempest threatens to reshape the city, more than one Miamian has told me they can’t wait, simply can’t wait for hurricane season to arrive. It’ll just take a Cat 2 or 3, they say. Then they’ll see the real Miami and leave.

Miami has always been a cultural outpost, a city of refugees from Latin America and the remaining white folk who stayed after the initial wave of Cubans signaled that the city would belong to them. If you live in Miami, it’s usually because you left a despotic motherland, or because you’ve been here so long that you can’t imagine living anywhere else. Most of us feel we could never live in any other American city, because the distinctly non-American ways of Miami have made us other. If surviving a hurricane is a Miami resident’s tevilah, learning to love the third-world, banana republic-style dysfunction is her bat mitzvah. “Americans” (as non-Miamians are called) come down here for the weekend, drink a little cafecito, hit the beach, dance some salsa, and then head back to hideous, freezing cold “America.” We’ve long tolerated them as moneyed outsiders who know better than to overstay their welcome. That
is until, like so much else in American life, the pandemic turned everything upside down.

It’s a familiar story by now: COVID hits, Florida “stays open,” and lockdown-fatigued blue state refugees flood the state. Early in the exodus, the refugees were dispersed throughout Florida. But then on Dec. 4, 2020, in response to a tweet from a venture capitalist in California—“ok guys hear me out, what if we move silicon valley to miami”—Mayor of Miami Francis Suarez fired off his now-infamous offer: “How can I help?” Apparently, that was all it took. Tech bros started making the pilgrimage to Miami, and overnight, Suarez became a national star.

To understand what’s going on in Miami, it’s important first to understand why prototypical Miami bro Francis Suarez was so eager to open the floodgates to the tired, the huddled masses of the Bay Area. Suarez, whose father, Xavier, was also mayor of Miami, is 305 royalty. A handful of politically connected families basically run this city; Suarez—photogenic and charming in that unctuous Miami way—was all but destined to lead us. As Miami’s chief hype man—the role he relishes more than any other—Suarez clearly loves his hometown. But his relentless participation in the Twitter psychodramas of California have always struck me as a little insecure. In this way, Suarez embodies another Miami stereotype: the overly defensive resident of an intellectual and cultural backwater, the proud son of a forgotten city, a “little sister” to the big boys of Hollywood, Silicon Valley, and Wall Street.

Suarez, who oozes national political ambition, clearly wants to will Miami into national prominence, transform it into a futuristic metropolis, and elevate his fortunes along the way. His conspicuous mix of supreme overconfidence and cringey desperation is getting a lot of heat from locals these days. Is putting Miami under Chicago-level national scrutiny really what Miamians want?

Is Big Tech’s impact on San Francisco something we really want a taste of?

Alas, I admit it: I can’t help liking the guy. His schtick is grating, but it’s also endearingly transparent to anyone who knows the city that shaped him. And at the risk of pissing off my many friends on the anti-Suarez bandwagon, I should also admit to something else: Suarez is right to want to change the city, and the tech bros ain’t so bad.

Miami has always been subject to cyclical waves of newcomers. Julia De-Forest Tuttle, the “Mother of Miami” and the only woman to have founded a major American city, came from Cleveland. In 1890, during the Mariel boatlift, over 125,000 Cubans flooded the city in a six-month stretch. In the years that followed, political strife in Central America ushered in a new set of demographic changes, and in the late 1990s, after Hugo Chavez rose to power, the Venezuelans came to town. Whether we roll our eyes at them or not, the blue state lockdown refugees see themselves as firmly in this tradition.

Even before the recent influx of talented, highly educated, successful outsiders, Miami was already in advanced stages of gentrification. Little Havana, which was once a strictly working-class Cuban enclave, is now populated by a hodge-podge of rich South Americans and spillovers from the upscale neighborhood of Brickell. The upper-middle-class, Northeast yuppie types who once would have seemed like visitors from Mars are now a regular fixture on streets like Calle Ocho. Wynwood, which not too long ago was still the hood, and later became a hub of hip local art galleries that handed out free booze on the first Saturday of every month, is now a bona fide tourist trap. The same goes for Little Haiti, Allapattah, and every other neighborhood around downtown. All of this predates the pandemic; none of it is Suarez’s fault.

What is different this time around is that the tech lords and crypto evangelists who responded to Suarez’s bat signal have set their sights on neighborhoods previously thought to be safe from gentrification. In the early stages of the blue state refugee influx, very few working-class Miamians had even heard of a “tech bro” and were clueless about the mayor’s courtship of them. Once they understood what was happening, they figured the techies would just set up shop in Brickell, Miami Beach, Coconut Grove, and Coral Cables, like the rich folks from the Northeast and South America. The fact that they settled on the working- and middle-class western suburbs instead came as a big shock.

Hialeah, a working-class neighborhood with the highest concentration of Cubans and Cuban Americans in the country—and where 95% of residents speak Spanish at home—is now suffering skyrocketing rents. In January, Miami Twitter suffered a collective psychological meltdown when a luxury real estate developer breaking ground in the neighborhood dubbed it the “Brooklyn of Miami.” Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine-Cava had to sign a new law requiring landlords to give residents a 60-day notice if their rent is going to increase by more than 5%. Even the rich folk of Brickell and Miami Beach are being forced out as rents in some cases have doubled. The experience of leasing a downtown studio apartment for $3,000-$4,000 a month might seem normal to the new arrivals, but many of the locals see it as the end of a dream. Hence the now-common refrain: We need another Andrew, bro.

The only Miamians who seemed to be early on the danger posed by the new arrivals were the small coterie of
woke artists and writers who make up the suffocatingly mediocre local intelligentsia, which is only capable of interpreting the arrival of fresh creative energy as an existential threat. But even the fears of these people—these stewards of an intellectual and cultural wasteland, whom I normally consider my enemies—I understand. On Sunday afternoons, walking with old friends past the bars we used to frequent 15 years ago, we now pass a certain kind of person whose appearance immediately fans the flame of an adolescent rage I thought I had extinguished long ago. It’s not that these people are predominately white, per se, but that there’s a certain cleanliness to them, a pristine sensibility and unblemished aesthetic I find repulsive. These people are the enemy of grime, and it’s the grime that brings me back to this street in the Grove every Sunday. I can see in the habits and demeanor of these people that they can’t wait to sanitize my beloved Grove, and I feel they must be stopped. Speak fucking Spanglish, I want to yell at these invariably polite and conflict-averse whites, or go back where you came from.

The intellectual scene in Miami has for years now been dominated by two opposing factions: on the one hand, wokes who read the Miami Herald and Miami New Times and join Knight Foundation-funded poetry collectives like O, Miami; on the other, people who are actively hostile to anything that even smacks of intellectualism. The latest estimates found locals in the latter category at a rate of about 99%. The grimy tropical city with a sexy, intellectually gory at a rate of about 99%. The grimy tropical city with a sexy, intellectually smacks of intellectualism. The latest estimates found locals in the latter category at a rate of about 99%. The grimy tropical city with a sexy, intellectually

or—probably more accurately—for the fact that nothing he produces seems to resonate with the people who know better. It’s been hard not to notice that the denunciations of Miami by Corben and his ilk have gotten shriller as more and more people decide to move here.

So it’s no surprise that Francis Suarez is a special object of scorn for Corben and the woke set. For them, Miami is a source of self-loathing; but Suarez keeps pitching it as a land of freedom and opportunity, and the tech bros keep buying it. What’s more, a big part of Suarez’s pitch for Miami is that outsiders are welcome to transform it. But the Corbenists need it to stay the same. Otherwise, what great fight are they fighting?

This past January, Hereticon, “A Conference for Thoughtcrime” organized by Mike Solana of Peter Thiel’s Founders Fund, took place on Miami Beach. Hereticon featured a who’s who of “heterodox” writers and tech entrepreneurs: Tyler Cowen, Tim Urban, Bret Weinstein, etc. They took over the luxurious Faena Hotel on South Beach for three days. The invite-only conference organized by outsiders and catered to a hyperelite audience of visitors and recent arrivals didn’t totally register on the city’s event calendar, which was counting down the days until the Ultra Music Festival and Miami Music Week in March. Still, it was nice to see that the mayor’s outreach to some of the biggest big shots in the country was embraced enthusiastically, and that the intellectual powerhouses seemed to feel welcomed and at home.

The dirty truth of the matter is that if Miami does stand a chance of casting the wokes into oblivion and becoming an intellectually viable city, it will be the tech bros, not the locals, who make it happen. The outsiders see more clearly than we do that the city’s natural sensibilities lean heterodox and anti-woke, even if the vast majority of residents have no idea what those words mean. It turns out that Miami Tech Week and the Bitcoin Conference code just as authentic as spring break. These tech bros, most of whom I find extremely annoying, have been Miamians all along. For better or worse, we’re neighbors now.

So let the intelligentsia and the panicky natives hate Suarez, I say. Eventually they’ll remember that Miami is and always has been a whore, always opening its legs to the newest injection of money and power. The rents were never going to stay low forever, anyway. At least the current crop is giving something back and, for the most part, isn’t interested in adding penthouses to the skyline with ill-gotten gains from blood and drugs. The tech bros only ever hang out with each other, take no interest in the locals who take no interest in them, and generally seem thrilled to be here. So what exactly is the problem?

In any case, it’s hurricane season. The next tropical cyclone is never far away. When it comes, I hope it covers the new arrivals in muck and chases them off Calle Ocho. I also hope they decide to stay.

This article was originally published on July 7, 2022.
The rest from the back pages

President Biden landed in Israel on Wednesday to meet with Israeli leaders and shore up diplomatic relations before a visit to Saudi Arabia later this week. “We will discuss building a new security and economy architecture with the nations of the Middle East,” acting Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid said at a press conference after greeting Biden in Tel Aviv. Meanwhile, the Biden administration continues to pursue a nuclear deal with Iran that would elevate Iran’s role in the region and for that reason has encountered significant opposition from Israel, a country that Iranian leaders have repeatedly threatened to destroy. “This is a PR stunt designed for America to pacify the American opposition [to the deal] by showing that the Israelis and Americans are hugging and everything is hunky-dory,” Israeli historian and writer Gadi Taub told The Scroll. “Israel is playing a role in a drama that is detrimental to its own interests.”

After Elon Musk attempted on Friday to back out of a deal to buy Twitter, the social media platform’s attorneys called the move “invalid and wrongful,” setting up what will likely be a major legal battle. When the deal was first made in April, Twitter and Musk agreed the platform was worth $44 billion, but the stock has dropped precipitously since then. Musk’s representatives claimed in a letter sent to Twitter on Friday that they were justified to terminate the agreement because Twitter’s long-standing estimate that 5% of users on the site are spam bots is far too low. More spam bots, Musk’s lawyers said, reflect a material adverse effect that grossly misrepresents the business that Musk agreed to purchase.

An analysis of Google search results found that those seeking information about student loans were being served advertisements offering questionable or outright scam services to borrowers. In a review of more than 240 advertisements, the Tech Transparency Project (TTP) found that roughly 12% of the advertisements offered dubious services with predatory monthly fees and in some cases mimicked government agencies while soliciting sensitive personal data.

The FBI was secretly running an encrypted messaging app, Anom, that it used to surveil tens of millions of messages over several years before storing them without warrants. Under the auspices of Operation Trojan Shield, as the program was called, the FBI created the messaging app, marketed it to criminals, and then had access to all messages sent across the platform, leading to thousands of arrests and sizable asset seizures that included weapons and narcotics.

Ramesh “Sunny” Balwani, the former president of Theranos, the infamous Silicon Valley startup that solicited investments by touting its revolutionary blood-testing technology that did not exist, was found guilty on all counts of fraud, just months after the company’s founder, Elizabeth Holmes, was found guilty of the same charges.

Japan’s longest-serving leader of the post-war era, Shinzo Abe, was assassinated by a lone gunman during a roadside campaign speech on Friday. Ahead of Japan’s upper house elections on Sunday, the influential former prime minister was stumping for a junior member of the heavily favored Liberal Democratic Party. Shot from behind by what police say was a homemade gun, Abe suffered wounds to his neck and heart and died hours later in an emergency room from a fatal loss of blood, according to a hospital official.

Like combatants in the Syrian civil war, military personnel in Ukraine have been wearing GoPro cameras (and fitting them to tanks and armored vehicles) since the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014. Streamed GoPro footage from Syria and Ukraine combines the visual aesthetics of first-person shooter video games with the immediacy and authenticity associated with real combat, producing a layered, gamified experience for viewers. Snippets of combat footage edited to produce the mini narratives conducive to sharing and virality—helicopter shootdowns, tank ambushes, and their aftermaths—circulate on social media platforms.

The instantaneity and directness resulting from the smartphone-social media ecology evokes a powerful sense of what the French media theorist Paul Virilio calls “tele-objectivity.” What is seen gains the status of an absolute truth, outside of any guiding narrative or mode of representation. The fidelity of the images on the smartphone screen, along with the visual logic of the social media “stream” or news feed, creates the illusion that the viewer is within—synchronously connected to, in fact—a immersive, constantly self-updating reality. The distant scenes of battle or atrocity come to seem more real, more immediate, than whatever domestic spaces they happen to be consumed in.

—“Christopher Lasch’s Angry Ghost” @ghostofchristo

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They Loved Me in Buchenwald

A tribute to Robert Clary, the French American actor who survived the Holocaust to take Hollywood by storm

BY PETER THEROUX

A week after Patton’s Third Army liberated Buchenwald, on April 19, 1945, the inmates gave a concert for the soldiers who had freed them. Fourteen Czech, German, Dutch, Belgian, and French musicians made up the band. The Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles has the following typed program on exhibit: There were sax, brass, and rhythm sections, and a sole vocalist—a Frenchman, Robert Widerman, who sang “In the Mood,” “A Tisket, A Tasket,” and “Honeysuckle Rose.” He also performed both roles in a Mickey and Minnie Mouse skit of his own creation, which had been a hit with the Nazis and kapos.

“We performed on the stage, in our striped uniforms, exhilarated by our new freedom, and gave the greatest show of our lives which hundreds of GIs and inmates applauded and shouted,” he noted in his memoirs. They closed the set with a “walloping version of ‘Tiger Rag’.”

A few weeks later, back home in Paris, the boyish but indefatigable Widerman, age 19, opened at the legendary Olympia on the Boulevard des Capucines, then one of the many Parisian venues requisitioned for American soldiers’ entertainment. He was the fourth on the bill, in an unenviable slot right after a performing dog act that always thrilled audiences. His first number was “Flat Foot Floogie,” followed by “Daisy Venez Avec Moi.” The audience wasn’t buying it. He was distraught at the perfunctory applause. “I had two more numbers to do, and I was having flop-sweat. I didn’t understand—they loved me in Buchenwald!”

The singer, who had changed his surname to Clary, took gigs all over Paris, working full time, dancing with socialites and prostitutes (“I remember one in particular. She was tall and looked like Joan Crawford ... a very good jitterbugger. We had a ball on the dance floor.”) He performed in blackface. He made friends with Charles Aznavour. He relocated to the south of France and worked around the clock.

Then, in 1947, American musicians went on strike. U.S.-based record producers scoured Europe for talent and one of the shrewdest A&R men, Harry Bluestone, visited France and immediately took to Clary, who was then touring on the Riviera. Thanks to Bluestone, lightning struck. Clary recorded a few songs which, a world away and unbeknownst to him, became hits in the U.S. His rendition of “Put Your Shoes on, Lucy” sold half a million copies and he charted on Billboard.

Offered a residence visa to move to the U.S., Clary did not hesitate, and manfully worked through the tearful adieux in France to a stay in New York and then Los Angeles. Meanwhile, his beloved sister Nicky, his family’s only other death camp survivor, had married a Texan and began what would be a long and happy life in suburban Dallas. (Clary would later visit there and serenade this sister and an overflow audience of Pepsi executives, including Richard Nixon, their lawyer, and Joan Crawford, wife of the CEO, on the eve of President Kennedy’s assassination, and continue to perform at the venue into mid-November, to predictably paltry audiences.)

The Kennedy assassination shocked but did not devastate a man who had spent years falling asleep next to death camp berth mates who would become corpses by the morning. But he had made a firm decision to veil his tragic youth in the past. Instead he faced the future, aspiring to music and comedy. His albums, a mix of ebullient French and English-language standards, sold well.

“Robert Clary began singing as long ago as he can remember,” read the primer liner notes of the 1955 album Meet Robert Clary. “Just as he was hoping to begin on a singing career, he was up-rooted by the war and sent to a prison camp for the duration. With the coming of peace, he made the rounds of French radio stations and cafes … [which] led to an engagement at Olympia Hall in Paris, and his career had begun.”

In LA, Clary rented a small apartment on Orchid Avenue behind Grauman’s Chinese Theater on Hollywood Boulevard. Clary made the rounds of agents and producers, appeared on talk shows, and occasionally splurged on dinner at the Pig n’ Whistle or Musso & Frank’s. Used to French meals consisting of several small courses, he was puzzled by the way Americans served a huge platter of “too much food” all at once. He felt fortunate that he had no French friends, as he was forced to focus on improving his English.

“I always loved ‘À Paris’ by Yves Montand,” Clary himself noted in his own contribution to the Meet Robert Clary liner notes. In fact, he and Montand burst onto the heady American scene at about the same time. While Clary hit Broadway in the musical revue New Faces of 1952 with, among others, Eartha Kitt, Alice Ghostley, and Paul Lynde (he crushed on both women but would recall Lynde as “cruel” and “antisemitic” especially when drunk), Montand starred in his own musical show. Both entertainers were thrilled by exuberant postwar America. The spell the New World cast extended even to the lofty Simone de Beauvoir, who marveled in her travel memoir America
“He was horrified by the soft and overt antisemitism of Patrick Buchanan and David Duke in the television news in the 1980s, and he started to speak out about his experiences.”

Clary’s third act, after the daytime dramas, was a quiet one. His reticence about the Holocaust ebbed in the 1980s, when he was horrified by the soft and overt overt antisemitism of Patrick Buchanan and David Duke in the television news in the 1980s, and he started to speak out about his experiences. This was “the best thing I did in my life” he told the Hollywood Reporter in 2015. His nightmares about the Holocaust, common since the 1940s, finally stopped.

There had been a time when it was common enough for World War II refugees to run into each other at parties, in major European and American cities, including Los Angeles, and in Clary’s telling, these encounters had always been low key. Where were you in the war? Prisoner? Me too. Where? Ah, you were in a camp, which one? Buchenwald. Ravensbruck, Treblinka ... How long? Right. And the subject was dropped in favor of current events, gossip, or sports.

But a much fuller catharsis came when Clary attended the World Gathering of Jewish Survivors of the Holocaust in Jerusalem in 1981. He instinctively took to Israel, Jerusalem, and the survivor community, connecting with the now aged, paunchy Israelis he had known as skinny young Parisians. He visited Yad Vashem and gave an observed the Geneva Convention and was not a concentration camp. The actors who played Colonel Klink and Sergeant Schultz—German Werner Klemperer, son of conductor Otto Klemperer, and Austrian John Banner—were Jews and he adored them as his “best friends” during the making of the show and as they aged together companionably in Los Angeles. Ivan Dixon, who played Kinchloe, was a brilliant performer who had already made the intense black-and-white movie Nothing but a Man in 1964; he would be the only cast member to quit the series for more ambitious work acting and directing. The only hint of tensions was with Bob Crane, who was the sole Republican.

Hogan’s Heroes, Clary notes, would remain a global hit for decades to come, even in Germany, under the name A Cage Full of Heroes.

In an innocent American age when it seemed everything French was sexy, cute, and chic—Bardot, Warner Bros.’ romantic skunk, Bob Hope’s ooh-la-la jokes about the Place Pigalle, the crêpes suzettes in fancy French restaurants American couples aspired to in every 1960s sitcom, from I Love Lucy to Pete and Gladys—Robert Clary stood out as French par excellence. He starred in New Faces of 1952, the musical revue turned film release by Twentieth-Century Fox, the first musical shot in Cinemascope. It was a hit, and Clary’s first real break, leading to his next and definitive big break.

Clary initially resisted the French stereotype, at first refusing to sing the crowd-pleasing song “Lucky Pierre” in New Faces, though he would eventually go along with it and succeed beyond his wildest dreams. In his latter acting years, in the 1980s, on The Young and the Restless, Clary rejected the producer Bill Bell’s suggestion that his nebbishy character be called “Frenchy.” “That’s a no-no. Please do not call me Frenchy,” Clary pleaded. He’d had enough of clichés. Funnily enough, they settled on the character being named “Pierre.” He wrote in his autobiography that “I have a huge stamp on my name. It says in big letters ‘TINY FRENCHMAN.’”

Then came the pilot for the sitcom Hogan’s Heroes, set in a Nazi POW camp, and his career-defining character as a tiny Frenchman, Louis LeBeau, who was not only a valiant little prisoner of war but also a gourmet chef (naturally). Some episodes featured him wearing a French chef’s white toque instead of his usual béret Basque. Successive seasons gave Clary more to do as his character developed, and his memoir, titled, like it or not, From the Holocaust to Hogan’s Heroes—dwells on issues he had to contend with, with growing impatience, over the decades: No, he did not mind playing a prisoner of the Germans. The Germans in the sitcom were Luftwaffe and not necessarily Nazis, and a stalag
A mid a global fertilizer shortage and worldwide food crisis precipitated by the war in Ukraine, cascading pandemic supply chain disruptions, and the ever-present challenges of climate change, some Catholics in the U.S. are working to reclaim traditional European farming methods and ways of life. In a time characterized by disruption and uncertainty, they are motivated by a desire for more autonomy in the way they feed and provide for their families, physically as well as spiritually. Among them are members of the Catholic Land Movement, a revival of the early-20th-century Catholic Land Associations, which arose in interwar Britain to combat

In Jerusalem, Clary’s sadness deepened, not only because of the memories being unearthed, but due to the logistics of the conference itself:

“My depression was a culmination of everything—being bused to Tel Aviv, being in this big place, and feeling that I was back in the camp taking orders (go to door G, not H; stay in line; wait your turn; stand up; sit down; salute; sing; stop; applaud; cry). All these things got to be too much for me.”

Far from dissuading Clary from probing his painful memories, the experience confirmed his educational mission and once back in California he quickly resumed his speaking activities, particularly at high schools, on behalf of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. He also resumed his hobby of painting.

Two years ago, I reached out via Tablet contributor Noah Pollak and Rabbi Abraham Cooper to ask to interview Clary, who is now 96 and lives in Beverly Hills. The answer was an extreme

Clary’s Polish, Orthodox Jewish father, Moishe Widerman, had emigrated to France but never really learned French despite his marriage to a Frenchwoman. Moishe was a distant parent, but his mother, Balia, doted on her children. Robert’s idyllic childhood in the large family ended with detention at Drancy, and being trucked through Germany, where the truck bed of terrified children drove past young Germans to laughter and taunts of “Dirty Jews!” On arrival at the camp, he narrowly missed instant selection and murder due to his apparent youth (“I was 16. I looked 12”). His mother’s last word to Robert in the death camp, before they were separated, was “Behave.” She knew that one wrong word from her quirky, loudmouth son could condemn him to the gas. Both parents were murdered within a week of arrival, which cost Clary his religious faith for good.

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Conference workshops, discussions, and events will include gardening, seed saving, haymaking and scything, livestock care, breadmaking, canning, and homeschooling.

Many of these interests fall under the category of homesteading, the self-sufficiency and small-scale farming trend that is currently enjoying a moment in broader secular society. In fact, it was Guidice's interest in agricultural traditionalism that brought him to Catholic traditionalism, which is a self-conscious revival of the liturgies, practices, and trappings of an earlier time in the Catholic Church. At the time of the original Catholic Land Associations in the late 1920s, customs and practices that are considered traditional today were the only thing available to Roman Catholics: Before the Vatican II reforms of the 1960s, the Catholic Mass was celebrated in Latin rather than local languages. In 2007 Pope Benedict XVI loosened the Vatican requirement to obtain special approval to practice the traditional Latin Mass. Even as the practice gained in popularity, traditionalism garnered controversy in Catholic circles as its more politically conservative elements increasingly began to voice objections to the Vatican II reforms, and even to question the legitimacy of Pope Francis himself, leading him to curtail the celebration of the TLM once again last year.

However, as the ownership of a Twitter account might suggest, Guidice is no Luddite. Originally from Long Island, he is not some provincial plowman. When we spoke over the phone, he recommended a farm-to-table restaurant near my grandparents, with a chef he described as "French Laundry level." In addition to his active Twitter presence, he is a frequent guest on podcasts. (He recently appeared on a call-in show for TradCatKnight, which describes itself as "a traditional Catholic website that covers: the apostasy in the Catholic Church, the coming one world religion/New Age, False Prophet & Antichrist, prophecy," as well as Freemasonry, "mainstream media brainwashing," FEMA camps, chemtrails, and "various endtime subjects," and has a paywalled post titled "Why Catholic Monarchy?").

Guidice describes the original Catholic Land Movement as reactionary, a deliberate response to early-20th-century industrialization. For him, "reactionary" is not a pejorative word. "I have a critical lens through which I view modernity in general," he said. Guidice is working to divest himself and his family from power structures that he believes do not have their best interests at heart, and places himself within a broader trend: "What I see, contemporarily, is that there is an equal reaction now to the consolidation of power by global technocracy, whether it's health tyranny or other aspects, there's a similar type of consolidation that's happening right now, and it's quite severe, it's quite dramatic. And people are reacting to that."

On a recent Zoom roundtable discussion, Guidice said: "Much of modernity is the inversion of natural order. When you work in the cadence of natural order, co-agitating with the graces that God gives us, and the grace that God is working in this world, a seasonality emerges ... there's a cadence and a rhythm, there's a time for things."

That roundtable was with a traditional Catholic media outlet Restoring the Faith, called "RETVRN to the Land! Discussion with 4 Dads who are DOIING IT—The Catholic Land Movement."

The moderator introduced the event this way: "There is a movement afoot as the world becomes more and more uncertain, as people are plagued by more and more anxiety, and as what I call the 'spidey sense' of many husband-father protector-providers continues to tingle. Everyone knows something's not right about the world, something's not right about the way many of us are living our lives, there's something evil about a master-planned community and we can't put our finger on it."

Guidice said he sees evidence that for Catholics, at least, this ambient sense of dread is coalescing around an intentional reclaiming of tradition and proximity to the land. With a little over a month to go at the time of this writing, the Catholic Land Conference has closed registration. "We are expecting over 250 people," Guidice said via text. "The emails are still rolling in. Given the interest, we are thinking about fitting an event to some aspect of the liturgical calendar, and creating a regular cadence to group meetings."

Locally, he sees further signs of hope for his movement: There is the family in his traditional Catholic parish who recently decided to move out to a farm. Guidice said there are two neighboring families who also bought land in Sharon Springs, drawn to living the Catholic Land Movement's ideals alongside him. He sees still further reason for optimism in the 20 people, both traditional and modern Catholics, who are working with him to create a 501(c)(3) Catholic Land Movement national organization to harness this energy. Beyond that, Guidice said he encounters plenty of Catholics who are increasingly interested in family farming, self-sufficiency, and raising animals, even if they are not aware of the Catholic Land Movement. Even Guidice, who began homesteading around a decade ago, said he finds himself "bewildered" by this stealthily, steadily growing phenomenon. "It's funny how fast all of this is moving," he said of roughly the past year, when he became more seriously committed to the Catholic Land Movement, and noticed an acceleration of outside interest. An acquaintance told him recently, "I just started this little Catholic agrarian..."
account on social media, and already it’s got like a thousand-some followers.”

“Here I am talking to another reporter,” Guidice said. “I talked to another reporter last night.”

The first Catholic Land Association—one of an eventual network of six regional associations across England and Scotland—was founded in 1929, to train young men and families in farming and land management. The original movement took shape against a backdrop of widespread unemployment and the abandonment of thousands of acres of British farmland, the result of globally collapsing currencies and prices. Father Vincent McNabb, a Catholic priest, had published an influential book a few years earlier, called The Church and the Land, detailing the plight of the urban poor (Catholicism in the U.K. was predominantly urban at the time), and proposing a return to agricultural means for the support of the community and the family. McNabb knew of what he spoke, having been introduced to farming during WW1, when German naval blockades had made farming a patriotic, even existential duty for Britons. He was also a man of letters, with a few particular connections in the worlds of publishing and journalism who helped him propitiate his views on the need for a Catholic exodus from the towns.

Reactionary in both its original British and current American incarnations, the Catholic Land Movement’s proposals for social organization defy what most in the U.S. likely think of as fiscal conservatism. According to one former Catholic Land Association farm worker, Bryan Keating, Father McNabb was not opposed to trade unionism or to what Keating called “working class movements.” Keating said McNabb was heavily influenced by Rerum Novarum, an 1891 encyclical by Pope Leo XIII. A response to laissez faire capitalism, the document put forward a vision of widespread, diffuse ownership of property to prevent the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of either the state or employers, a concept known as distributism. In 1931, during the Catholic Land Movement’s heyday, Pope Pius XI introduced another encyclical further developing predecessors’ thoughts on the topics of labor and property. Quadragesimo Anno added to distributism the principle of subsidiarity, that the state and market must not usurp for themselves the functions proper to smaller, more locally organized institutions like the church, community, or the family.

The original Catholic Land Associations influenced by McNabb were intensely focused on the importance of family. Today’s Catholic Land Movement also places family at the forefront. “What’s the lowest level of social organization?” Guidice asks. “The family. So [the Catholic Land Movement is] intrinsically focused on domestic production and healthy family lives,” which the catechism of the Catholic Church calls “the original cell of social life.” For Guidice, however, this centering of the family is not a reaction to what he calls “culture war stuff.” To Guidice’s way of thinking, if people are turning to tribalism, nationalism, and other more ancient forms of association like race and ethnicity, as they sense the wheels coming off the post-WWII liberal order, it’s crucial for the good guys to be standing by with a productive outlet for those energies. His solution is simple: “Why don’t we just teach each other how to garden?”

In this respect, the TradCatKnight call-in show notwithstanding, Michael Thomas of Sharon is not so different from the Catholics outside of his rural Traditional Latin Mass community. While land ownership, a primary aim of the Catholic Land Movement, is a tricky proposition for many, said William Dinges, professor of religion and culture at Catholic University of America, when it comes to its more modest aims of reacquainting Americans with smaller-scale things like gardening and composting, “I would totally endorse that.” As an academic, religion and ecology are part of his areas of expertise. Also a certified master composter in the Netherlands, the band describes its sound as blending “classical Indian music, Krautrock, traditional folk, ’70s rock, and acid-tinged psych.”

Neither sonic maximalists nor endless jammers, Kikagaku Moyo is musicians who know when to push forward and when to pull back. Their newest and seemingly last release, Kumoyo Island, opens with a groove that’s impossible to get out of your head. “Monaka” is a reference to a Japanese sandwich treat, and the song’s melody takes influence from minyo folk music, “mona-kana-kanon, mona-kana-naka-naka,” before spinning into Ryu Kurosawa’s sitar.

The band retreated from Amsterdam back to Tokyo and found some personal freedom in the restrictions wrought from COVID lockdowns. Going back to Amsterdam wasn’t an option, and neither was going on tour. They spent all their time in Shitamachi, Tokyo’s old, working-class downtown. From sweets to abstraction, the sounds of coming home resonate on Kumoyo Island.

—David Meir Grossman
“at that time, there was not anything to speak of:”

“I’m trying to start a revolution in urban gardening,” said Dinges, who used to spend weekends at a faith-centered agrarian commune and retreat center, in what he calls his “quasi-hippie days.” Originally from western Kansas, Dinges spent eight years working on a farm in his youth, to which he attributes his academic interest in ecology today. He likes Guidice’s idea of encouraging smaller-scale efforts at gardening, something he views as more realistic and less likely to cause disillusionment with the hard work of a true return to the land. “I know the reality of farm work and what that entails, and I have discovered over the years some other folks don’t know that,” he said.

As for the relationship of the wider Catholic Church to the environment, Dinges points to more recent works by the late Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis, calling Catholics to what he calls ecological conversion. “We’re transitioning from a techno-industrial into an ecological age,” he said. “That, by definition, necessitates an ecological conversion, which is a really radical alteration in root reality. Conversion is not simply compliance behavior. It’s taking an entirely new way about ourselves, about this beautiful blue planet.” In his 1990 World Peace Day statement, Pope John Paul II specifically linked humanity’s turning away from nature in pursuit of consumerism and instant gratification to deeper moral problems. It was, Dinges said, “the first time from the papacy that a document of this nature was devoted exclusively to ecology and the environment, among other things, framing this as a profoundly moral issue.” In 2015, Pope Francis, the frequent object of traditionalist Catholic criticism, published the papal encyclical Laudato Si’. An encyclical is “the highest form of teaching authority in the Church,” Dinges said. In this ecological document, sounding a lot like Guidice and company, Francis told the faithful, “We were not meant to be inundated by cement, asphalt, glass and metal, and deprived of physical contact with nature.”

The bucolic communities extolled by the Catholic Land Movement’s original founders were part of an effort to salvage or reinstitute an agrarian reality that had previously existed in the culturally and ethnically homogenous societies of Britain. A movement that draws its aesthetic and philosophical origins from Northern Europe may have a hard time making inroads. While Guidice pointed out that much of the Catholic Church’s liturgical calendar is synchronous with the agricultural seasons, he acknowledged that this is not the case in the Global South, where Easter happens in winter and Christmas in the summer. Indeed, the Argentine Pope Francis hails from the Global South himself. Today, about half of all U.S. Catholics are Latino (that number climbs to 60% for Catholics under 18).

Guidice is also aware of the potential shadow side. “A reactionary movement that touts a traditionalist orientation,” he said, “can manifest things that aren’t good, to be frank about it. We know the consequences of Germany and the Weimar Republic and what happened there.” While he admits his focus has been primarily on English Catholicism and agrarian traditions, he acknowledges that today’s Catholic Land Movement in the U.S. must take into account the country’s geographic and cultural diversity. “America definitely calls us to think about those types of questions,” he said.

Indeed, some of the controversy surrounding traditional Catholicism relates to its bigoted elements. “These communities aren’t just standing up for traditional liturgy and the aesthetic glories of the European church tradition,” reads a 2021 opinion article in the left-leaning National Catholic Reporter. “They also sincerely believe that the Western European tradition is fundamentally superior. On that basis, they routinely defend acts of violence such as the crusades, which they see as ‘Holy Wars.’ Google ‘defense of the inquisition’ and an array of articles will appear—mostly from traditionalist Catholic sites.” And yet, the piece notes, the Latin language liturgy itself isn’t so different from Hebrew in Judaism, Slavonic in Orthodox Christianity, or Arabic in Islam. The Latin Mass need not be a gateway to white supremacy, since there are nonwhite traditional Catholic communities.

Guidice sees the Catholic Land Movement as a prophylactic against the xenophobia or racism that can accompany traditionalism for its own sake. “Having this idea that there’s reaction to the consolidation of power, that ends up as some type of demagoguery tool, or something that furthers the consolidation of state power, or even just an ugly reaction,” he said, “I believe that the Catholic Land Movement offers—I don’t say wholesome, but yeah, a wholesome, good place to steer that journey.” He paraphrased C.S. Lewis: “We all want progress, but if we go down the wrong
Dinges identifies the American political left-right binary as an obstacle to a more widespread Catholic ecological movement. The urgent ecological message of *Laudato Si’* has garnered little attention from U.S. bishops, who appear reluctant to speak out on the partisan issue of climate change, which is among the encyclical’s subjects, or to be seen aligning themselves with Pope Francis, who can be a Catholic culture war lightning rod. “If Catholics don’t hear this unambiguously from the pulpit, if it’s not integrated into their liturgical life, then the message is not getting out,” he said. This is a problem, however, for which Guidice sees an answer. He doesn’t necessarily see himself remaking society in the Catholic Land Movement’s image, pursuing what he calls “grand platforms,” even if he believes in the power of his movement to transform it. He said the emphasis is on doing, on work, with “movement” being an operative word in “Catholic Land Movement,” which in the end, he feels, leaves little time for ideological disputes.

In keeping with his interest in distributism and subsidiarity, Guidice envisions the eventual creation of what he calls a Catholic Land Movement “hub,” a standing, deployable agricultural resource capability that can give workshops to the wider community on composting, canning, and other things to help repair fracturing connections, both between humanity and nature, but within society itself. ■

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For those lucky enough to survive the COVID-19 era with their health and livelihoods generally intact, there likely has even been some light let in through the fissure of what we used to take as unbreakable.

It turns out sourdough is a sanity restorer that, unlike therapy, can double as breakfast. When brick-and-mortar synagogues are closed, spiritual bliss, camaraderie, even some schnaps can be found in your neighbor’s yard. Nightly dinners involved actually sitting down with members of your family with nowhere to run off to afterward, and a summer peanut-butter-sandwich-fueled RV trek to the Midwest gifted your kids with the indelible memories you once thought would necessitate being fleeced for a Disneyland fast pass. Your daughter’s wedding could somehow go off without a hitch without 400 of your closest friends.

Some tablets being broken didn’t turn out so bad after all.

So why, how even, are we expected to have what amounts to a day of shiva for severed old ways?

The ancient rabbis weren’t unaware of the implications of what Moses did when he shattered God’s words. “Yasher koach that you broke them,” they imagine God having said when Moses let the stones fall.

But the shattering, as it turns out, wasn’t the end of the story.

You see, after breaking the originals, Moses carved a new set of tablets. His throwdown wasn’t an excuse to get all antinomian, but an effort to refresh and reinvigorate. The words were the same, but, this time, they were just a bit looser around the edges. They weren’t penned by God’s divine finger but by Moses’ human hands. The letters didn’t change. They just breathed a little easier. A bit more forgiving and a tad less intimidating, they might have offered less promise than the prior set, but this time, they were ours to keep.

Moses, and the rabbis following him, knew that it was easy to drop something. But picking up when it’s time to rebuild and continue the trek through the wilderness we call life is where the real meaning is made.

Sure—we had an extended pause. Sheltering in place sure as heck was no standing at Sinai, but the respite from the regular it provided some unexpected delights. For some. Others are not so lucky. Whether you had to miss medical treatments, spent two years attending Zoom “school,” or were locked into a cramped home with a person you realized you no longer wanted to be your spouse, there’s brokenness that won’t be fixed any time soon. But whether you feel reinvigorated or still in need of repair, it’s time to move forward.

And that’s exactly the point of the day.

In a striking teaching, the rabbis give us a window into Judaism’s most mysterious structure. The holy ark, which even the High Priest couldn’t even glimpse the outside of except on Yom Kippur, served as a beacon pointing the way toward the Promised Land. Inside, the rabbis teach, lay two sets of tablets. There were the shards of the ones Moses broke on the 17th of Tammuz. And there was the new set. Then, just like now, marching forward meant holding on to repaired and disjointed fragments side by side.

So let’s take this 17th of Tammuz on as a challenge, even if fasting is too much for you. Pausding to consider what the past rendered is an opportunity to consider how the future might honor it while taking its own shape.

You know that newfound enthusiasm you have for Friday night prayers? Bring it back with you to shul. That babka you figured out how to whip up? It’ll go over great at the charity bake sale you organize. That young mom who asks to work from home two days a week even though the rest of the team is back in the office? Do yourself a favor and don’t give her a hard time about it. Make a Shabbat dinner for friends looking for a shidduch. And that ad for a Venice vacation that pops up on Facebook? Ignore it and go rev up that RV again. It’s time for you, too, to rewrite life by your own hand.

This article was originally published on July 14, 2022.
### PREPARATION

#### TO MAKE THE CAKE

**Step 1**  
Preheat the oven to 350.

**Step 2**  
Place the egg whites in a mixing bowl and carefully begin to beat with a mixer. As bubbles develop, reduce the speed to medium and gradually add the sugar. Once all the sugar has been added, increase the speed of the mixer to high. Beat until the whites are firm, glossy, and hold a peak. Set aside.

**Step 3**  
In a separate mixing bowl, beat the yolks for 4 minutes before adding the butter, coffee, milk, and rum.

**Step 4**  
Fold at least a cup of beaten whites into the yolks, then fold in the remaining beaten whites.

**Step 5**  
Sift the flour; add the baking powder and salt. Sprinkle on top of the egg mixture and gently fold in until combined.

**Step 6**  
Pour on the into a lightly buttered 10-inch spring form cake pan and bake at 350 for about 25-30 minutes or until a skewer inserted in the center comes out clean and the sponge cake is gently browned. Invert the cake onto a cooling rack before cooling completely.
TO MAKE THE ICING

Step 1
Meanwhile, make the icing by melting the dark or milk chocolate in the microwave, or in a bowl over just simmering water.

Step 2
In a mixing bowl, beat together the unsalted butter and half of the sieved confectioners sugar until light and fluffy.

Step 3
Mix in the remaining confectioners sugar and melted chocolate until thick and creamy. Once the icing is cool, spread it on top of the cake leaving a 1/3 inch border around the edge.

Yield: Serves 6