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DESIGNS FOR A NEW CALIFORNIA
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HATRED

THE TOXIC WATERS OF AMERICAN LIFE

EDITOR'S NOTE

BLUEPRINT

A magazine of research, policy, Los Angeles and California

HATE IS ON THE RISE IN AMERICA: 2021 saw more than 10,000 hateful acts of violence across the United States, the most ever recorded in this nation. And no wonder. Political leaders routinely descend to rhetoric once considered out of bounds for normal discourse; anti-immigrant sentiment veers into threats of harm; television personalities spout “replacement” theory, echoing the words and sentiments of white nationalists. Racism is flourishing, often behind the veil of discussions around immigration or public health.

Much has been written about the shattering of norms in recent years, but none has so infected the nation as the rise of hatred. It shrouds other debates in fear and undergirds the deepening problem of polarization. As author Curtis White recently wrote: “Each side casts the other in frighteningly reductive terms. Democrats are socialist baby killers, and the Republican base is stupid, violent, and bigoted.” With terms so drawn — and all sides emboldened by hatred — there seems little remaining room for conversation, much less compromise.

It feels new in its intensity, but in fact, hatred is stubbornly historical. Racism, religious bigotry and violent nationalism are among history’s most enduring and terrifying phenomena, periodically rising to engulf communities, nations and, occasionally, the world.

What, then, to make of hatred? Is it the work of groups or brain chemistry? Why does it seem so suddenly emergent? Those are among questions that a host of researchers at UCLA and elsewhere are exploring as part of a broad effort to better understand the place of hatred in society. Funded by a \$3 million gift from an anonymous donor, the project, called the Initiative to Study Hate, is ambitious in its scope and addressed to a set of problems that leave many Americans unsettled. It is tackling questions of hatred from many angles — psychological, sociological, historical and others — and it already comprehends nearly two dozen discrete research studies.

David Myers, a distinguished professor of history and director of the Luskin Center for History and Policy, launched the idea and secured the funding. He sees the presence of hatred in the present and across generations, in organizations and deep in the psychology of individuals. And it takes different forms: crime and violence, of course, but also discrimination,

stereotyping and bias. It lurks beneath homophobia and cultural arrogance, and it expresses itself in political speeches, comedy and torchlit marches.

“Hate is so pervasive in our world that it almost seems too daunting to take up,” Myers said in announcing the undertaking. “This new initiative aims to understand how and why hate functions as it does.”

The Initiative to Study Hate is an attempt to bring scholars together around these questions, to pool and exchange ideas in the hope that they will generate more ideas and, perhaps, lead to better ways of addressing the issue. That work will unfold over the next three years.

Meanwhile, hatred will continue, as will its destructive effects. Nowhere is that more tragic than in one of the projects examined in this issue of Blueprint. Jocelyn Meza, an assistant professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences at UCLA, is researching the implications of racial bias in the study of suicide. Neglect in this area is long-standing, with one consequence being that suicides by young children of color are often mislabeled. A drug overdose by a White child may be seen as the culmination of emotional turmoil, while one by a Black child may be logged as an accident. The ramifications of such bias are withering: They highlight the potential for vastly underestimating the stress on young people of color.

And consider this: The stress those children feel might itself be the result of hatred directed toward them. Hatred, in the form of bias, begets hatred, in the form of neglect. And, in the end, a child dies.

It is difficult to imagine matters of graver concern or broader reach. Hatred undermines policy in government offices from Los Angeles to Washington. And it visits the devastated parent, lonely in grief. This demands our attention.



JIM NEWTON
Editor-in-chief, Blueprint

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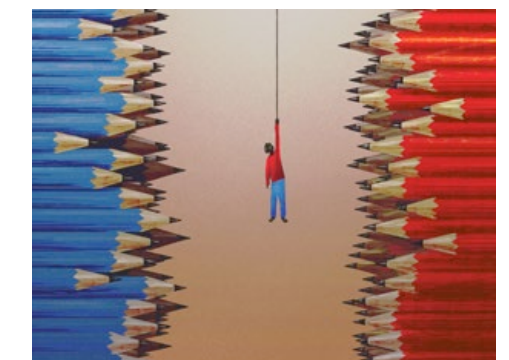
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MS. FEINSTEIN AT A MARCH IN MEMORY OF HER SLAIN COLLEAGUES IN NOVEMBER 1979.

THE PASSING
OF LIONS

Dianne Feinstein and Jerry Brown exit

CALIFORNIA’S LEADERSHIP IS CHANGING. Just a few years apart, the two dominant figures of this state’s last 50 years are moving off the main stage. Jerry Brown, California’s longest-serving governor, left office in 2019. Now, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, its longest-serving senator, has announced her plans to depart at the end of her term in 2024.

It can be a cliché to declare eras as ending, but in this case, a wealth of history is wrapped up in the lives of these leaders, who together have indeed defined an era. Not because they are identical. In fact, Brown and Feinstein are very different — one Catholic, one Jewish; one born into politics but initially determined to avoid

it, the other captivated at a young age and never away from it since. But their lives and careers have intertwined professionally and personally to make California the place that it is.

Through the work of these two officials, California has acquired its modern identity — serious, broad-minded, environmentally aware, supportive of immigrants, skeptical of guns. It has moved from the fringe of the left to the center of liberal leadership and become the fifth-largest economy in the world, a powerhouse of innovation, growth and environmental stewardship.

The state’s future leaders are eager to step up, and they already are. As they ascend, they do so on the shoulders of greats.

Both Brown and Feinstein grew up in San Francisco. Feinstein was born in 1933, Brown in 1938. Their families knew each other. Brown’s older sister, Cynthia, went to high school with Feinstein, who attended Stanford, as did Brown’s younger sister, Kathleen. Brown’s father, Pat

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/PAUL SAKUMA

Brown, gave Feinstein her start in public office, appointing her to the California Women’s Parole Board in 1960.

As a boy, Jerry Brown tried to avoid politics, slightly appalled by his father’s work (Pat Brown was San Francisco’s district attorney in Jerry’s early youth). He opted for the deeper work of the priesthood. But he thought better of it and, after leaving the seminary and graduating from law school, made his first forays into political life in Los Angeles, where he ran for a seat on the newly formed community college board in 1969. He finished first out of 133 candidates.

Thus began their sometimes parallel, sometimes intersecting careers. Feinstein served as a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Brown was elected secretary of state; then, in 1974, governor. Feinstein came to national attention in the tragic fall of 1978, when Jonestown rocked San Francisco. Then, terrifyingly, the city’s mayor and first openly gay elected supervisor were murdered on the same day — Nov. 27, 1978 — by former supervisor Dan White. As governor at the time, Brown grappled with the state’s other momentous event that year, the passage of Proposition 13, which reordered California’s tax system.

In 1982, Brown was defeated in a halfhearted bid for the U.S. Senate, losing to San Diego Mayor Pete Wilson. Feinstein came up short in her campaign for the governorship in 1990 to the same person, who was by then Sen. Wilson, and when Wilson vacated his Senate seat to become governor, Feinstein replaced him in a special election to the Senate.

Brown has held the governorship twice, from 1975 to 1983 and again from 2011 to 2019. Feinstein has held her Senate seat continuously since 1993. Feinstein beat Brown’s former chief of staff, Gray Davis, to win her first Senate race in 1992. Feinstein and Brown have never run against each other.

Brown, famously a bachelor in his first terms as governor, married Anne Gust in 2005. Feinstein officiated at their wedding.

Some commentators, recounting the Brown-Feinstein overlap in history, have emphasized an overlap in their politics as well. That was true, up to a point: Although both are unambiguously Democrats, both defied party orthodoxy — Brown on budgets and Feinstein on judicial nominees, among other things.

But they think for themselves, and their greatest achievements are monuments to work that emphasizes unity: Feinstein, who came to office in the shadow of an assassination, gave America long relief from assault weapons. Brown, who came of age in the early years of California’s modern environmental movement, did more than any elected state official of our time to take the lead in the fight against climate change. Their achievements in those two areas should remind us that party loyalty is not the ultimate ambition of politics. Progress is.

Still, Feinstein and Brown are different. Feinstein throws back to the politics of old Washington, when officials fought it out on the floor and then socialized afterward; where disagreements were contested in a larger atmosphere of respect. Feinstein is bipartisan in the old sense — a Democrat but a deal-maker, backed by one of Washington’s most highly regarded staffs, respected by colleagues and even adversaries. She is formidable.

TWO OVERLAPPING CAREERS — AND LIVES — THAT HAVE SHAPED MODERN CALIFORNIA.

Brown, meanwhile, exists not so much between the parties as outside of them. He was drawn to environmental issues in part by their depth of consequence and their indifference to more ephemeral political struggles. As Brown likes to note, referring to Paul in Galatians, God is not mocked, nor is the environment. For Brown, its commands are deeper than the struggles in conventional political debates. Brown, too, is formidable, but he also is iconoclastic. If Feinstein is at the center of American politics, at least as it was, Brown is above those politics altogether.

Today, Brown contributes to the culture of his state from his outpost in Colusa. Feinstein remains in Washington, D.C., but she has begun to prepare for her return to San Francisco.

They are leaving the state to younger, more conventionally liberal successors. Gov. Gavin Newsom, another San Franciscan, holds Brown’s old office in the state Capitol. Newsom champions many of the same causes as Brown, although he approaches them more predictably than his predecessor. To take just climate change as an example: Newsom is no less committed than Brown to addressing that issue, but Newsom is unlikely to reach for Galatians to explain his views.

Those who would come after Feinstein include three prominent members of the California congressional delegation: Adam Schiff, Katie Porter and Barbara Lee (two of whom have appeared in past issues of Blueprint, Schiff in the fall of 2020, Lee in the spring of 2021). Any of them would pull California modestly to the left, replacing the centrist Feinstein with a more progressive senator. There is no chance that the Senate seat from very blue California will be held by a Republican or anyone to Feinstein’s right.

So, what does it matter, then, if one liberal Democrat is replaced by another? Maybe it’s just the tug of nostalgia, but it’s sad to see these lions return to their dens. When Jerry Brown and Dianne Feinstein first moved into the leadership of California, this was the state of granola, cults and hot tubs; it was dangerous, sometimes fun, but not to be taken seriously.

Largely because of them, it is now.

— **Jim Newton**



SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN (MIDDLE) MEETS WITH THEN-OAKLAND MAYOR JERRY BROWN (LEFT) AND THEN-SAN FRANCISCO MAYOR GAVIN NEWSOM (RIGHT) IN HER WASHINGTON OFFICE IN 2008.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNITED STATES SENATE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

FIRST PERSON
HOLLYWOOD—
ADJACENT

Not Every Los Angeles
Writer Dreams of Breaking
Big in ‘The Industry’



IF YOU LIVE IN LOS ANGELES and make a living as a writer, particularly as a journalist, then people likely have a preconception about you: You’re doing it only until you sell a script.

The belief is understandable. The entertainment industry means glamour. Journalism brings ink stains (if your publication still prints) and, more frequently, a desperate pursuit of web clicks. Hollywood success blasts your name across a huge screen, or at least millions of little ones. Journalism delivers a 10-point byline that most readers ignore.

Selling a script to a studio, network or streaming service brings in a check with five to seven figures. Journalism, well — suffice to say, few do it for the money.

Real journalists, goes the argument, flock to places like New York, Washington, D.C., or London. If you’re telling stories in L.A., then it must mean you want to tell stories in Hollywood.

That may be the case for some journalists, and I have nothing against anyone pursuing that path. But I have a confession: I have never written a script. In fact, I have never even tried.

Not only have I not sought to land a film deal, but I have never drafted even the first page of a treatment. I have not searched for a TV agent with

a sample episode of “The Simpsons” and my own spec script. Nor have I offered up a video game concept. I don’t have a great idea for a short.

But here is the craziest thing of all: I’m completely fine with this. More than that: I’m happy having nothing to do with Hollywood.

I have nothing against “The Industry.” I watch ridiculous amounts of TV and numbers of movies.

I have friends who are successful writers, actors, producers or showrunners, and I know how much time and heart they put into getting where they are. My wife makes a living working long hours doing script supervision on commercial and film sets.

I’ve dabbled with “the biz.” When I arrived in L.A. a few decades ago, I had gigs as a production assistant on music videos. I had signed up with one of those temp agencies that drops you into Hollywood jobs, where I got to witness agents screaming at their assistants (the cliché is real). I did some freelance script coverage, earning tiny

IF YOU’RE TELLING STORIES IN L.A., THEN IT MUST MEAN YOU WANT TO TELL STORIES IN HOLLYWOOD.

sums to do the first read of a script sent in by a nobody without an agent. Higher-ups would look at my encapsulation and decide if reading the script was worth their time.

I was probably average to awful at most of these pursuits, and later brushes with “The Industry” went nowhere. A junior agent who liked a

magazine article I wrote invited me to lunch, and as we parted ways he proclaimed, “Let’s keep the momentum going.”

The momentum did not keep going.

My work as a journalist did.

Early on, I wrote a number of entertainment industry profiles, including stories about rising actors. I enjoyed the work, and I didn’t yearn to create characters those actors would inhabit. Weirdly, and completely accidentally, I began getting assignments to write about news, business and local politics.

I soon found that, even if these lacked the buzz associated with the entertainment industry, they often demanded more of me as a writer. I appreciated that challenge more than the idea of tightening up a script’s third act.

Over time, I found myself writing about subjects including land use and the power plays in City Hall, topics that would surely turn a pitch meeting into a three-minute, no-we’ll-call-you visit.

I see a fantastic story arc in my dozens of articles about the 2022 election cycle that led to Karen Bass becoming mayor of L.A., but I’m not dumb enough to think it would make an eight-part streaming series that more than 50 people would watch.

Again, that’s OK. I’m lucky — I’ve been able to make a living digging into subjects I know are important to the city. My dreams have nothing to do with the Dream Factory. I don’t need to see or be seen power lunching with an agent or a producer at Mr. Chow or the Polo Lounge.

Heck, I wouldn’t know what to say, or where to park.

I love the writing I do — stories about Los Angeles, for Los Angeles. I’m Hollywood-adjacent, and that’s more than enough.

— **Jon Regardie**



“A LIGHTER LOOK”
AT COUNTRY
HUMOR

Rick Meyer’s regularly appearing
column takes a lighter look at politics
and public affairs around the world.
This month: ‘Hoots and Hollers!’

I GREW UP IN THE HILLS. One of the first jokes I heard was a warning: “They’ll know you’re a hayseed if you tell ‘em you know how to use a weed whacker indoors.”

It wasn’t entirely a joke.

Country humor is my favorite kind. It usually contains a kernel of truth. Two stand-out collections are:

Butter My Butt and Call Me a Biscuit: And Other Country Sayings, So-Sos, Hoots and Hollers.

Laughter in Appalachia: A Festival of Southern Mountain Humor.

“THEY’LL KNOW YOU’RE
A HAYSEED IF YOU TELL ‘EM
YOU KNOW HOW TO USE A
WEED WHACKER INDOORS.”

In *Butter My Butt*, Allan Zullo, a writer from the hills of North Carolina, and Gene Cheek, his colleague, applaud country humor because it is clever, colorful, endearing, vivid and funny.

Sometimes, they say, it makes you ponder. “As Maya Angelou once said, ‘Listen carefully to what country people call mother wit. In those homely sayings are couched the collective wisdom of generations.’ ”

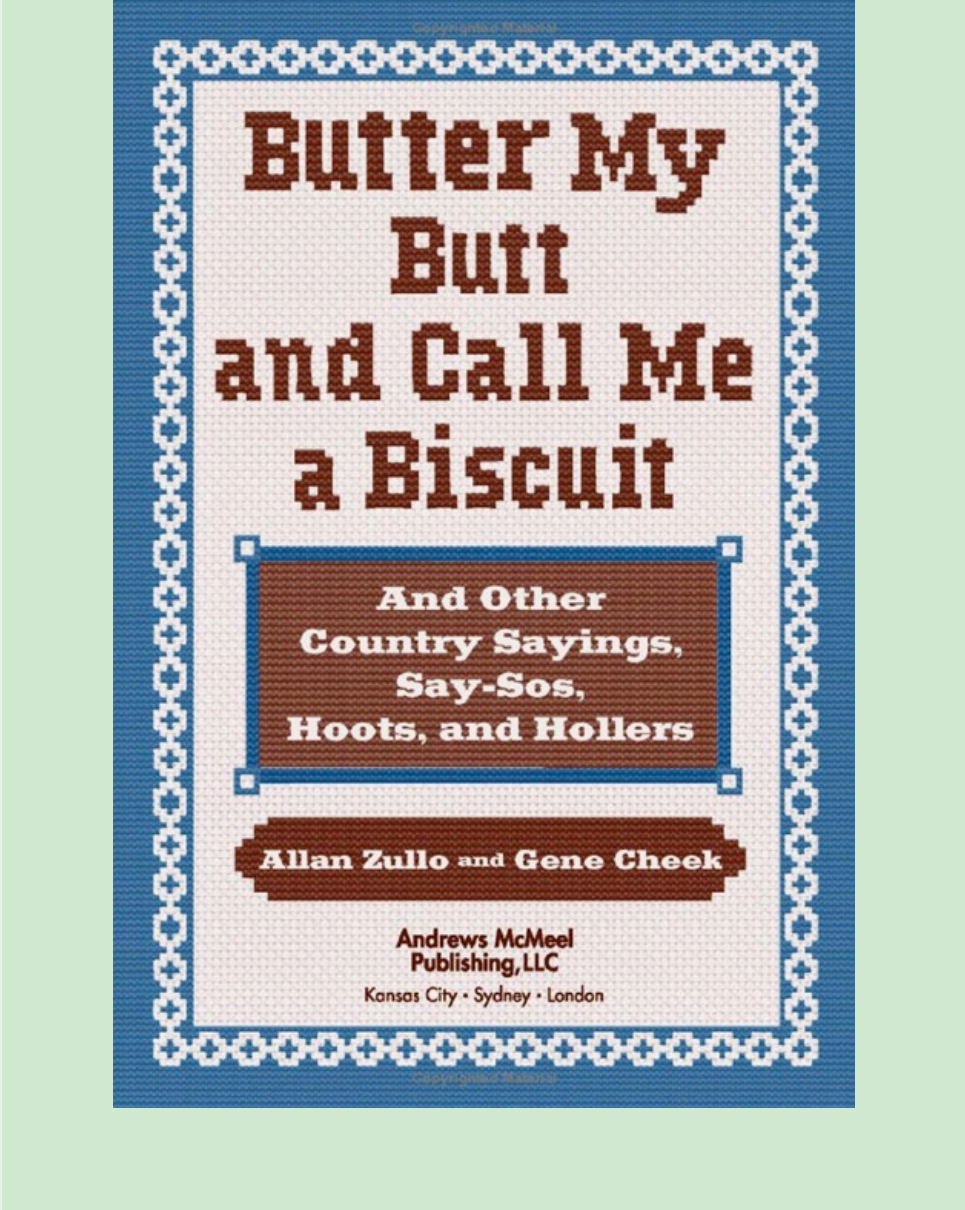
In *Laughter in Appalachia*, Loyal Jones, a longtime director of the Appalachian Center at Berea College, and Billy Edd Wheeler, a songwriter, storyteller, singer, playwright and poet, say country humor has this important quality: It belongs to everyone.

Good laughs, they say, “make the rounds and become the property of those who appreciate them.”

For example, some pearls of wisdom from *Butter My Butt*:

“Never kick a cow patty on a hot day.”

“You’ll sit a long time with your mouth wide open before a roasted chicken flies in.”



“Excuses are like backsides — everybody’s got one.”

“Two wrongs don’t make a right, but they sure do make it even.”

Some trenchant descriptions:

“He was so drunk he couldn’t see through a ladder.”

“He’s about as sharp as an egg.”

“He’s been baptized so many times every crawdad in the creek knows him by name.”

“Are those your legs or are you ridin’ a chicken?”

Now a story from *Laughter in Appalachia*:

“The country preacher awoke one morning to find a dead mule on the highway in front of his home.

“Calling the county health department in the county seat, he said, ‘This is Reverend Jones. There’s a dead mule on the road in front of my house, and I’d appreciate having it removed as promptly as possible.’

“The young clerk who answered the call thought he would have a little fun. ‘Uh, Reverend Jones,’ he said, ‘I always thought you preachers took care of the dead yourselves.’

“The preacher caught the kidding in the young man’s tone, but he didn’t let on. His reply was serious.

““We do. Yes, but in the case of jackasses we like to speak to the next of kin first.”

Humor doesn’t get much better than that.

Yes, I’m a hillbilly. And if you don’t like it, kiss my grits.

— **Richard E. Meyer**

The Long Recovery

After a Violent Childhood and Prison, Kevin Shird
Made the Decision to Change

WRITTEN BY
MOLLY SELVIN
PHOTOS BY
IRIS SCHNEIDER



“Man, I hate drugs. They just mess me up.”

Kevin Shird didn’t feel well. Most of the way through a course of steroids to relieve a sinus problem, he complained that he hadn’t slept well or been able to concentrate — side effects he attributed to the drug.

Shird pulled a burgundy hoodie up around his neck and struggled to ignore his pain and steroid-induced jumpiness. He rubbed his eyes, rubbed his days-old stubble, and rocked his chair against the wall of a small conference room where we talked at the Pico branch of the Santa Monica Library.

The grouching was a bit rich. Shird doesn’t drink alcohol. Never liked it, he said. He smoked some weed as a teenager but did not take hard drugs.



Yet during the 1990s, Shird ran one of Baltimore’s major heroin and cocaine rings. By his 20s, Kevin Shird was clearing more than \$20,000 a day in cash. The notoriety of Shird’s West Baltimore operation was such that one of his drug runners appeared in David Simon’s 1997 account of that neighborhood, *The Corner*. The book became the basis for an HBO miniseries and later a blockbuster television series, *The Wire*.

Shird grew wealthy by hooking an untold number of Baltimore residents on heroin. After serving 12 years behind bars on a series of federal narcotics charges, Shird, now 54, remade himself through slow, painful self-examination. He is a writer and a mentor to young men who are caught up in a misery he knows well: the toxic stew of racism and poverty-born trauma that can boil into hate and violence.

The Los Angeles newcomer has authored books and screenplays as well as a college curriculum on combating racism. He is a speaker on mental health, substance abuse prevention and re-entry into society after incarceration.

He believes that his own path to redemption — he calls it that — holds lessons for poor, young Black men drifting, as he was, toward danger.

THAT REDEMPTION WAS LONG IN coming and hard won.

A tumultuous family life defined Shird’s childhood. It included his father’s alcoholism, domestic violence, poverty and a threat of eviction. He was identified as a gifted student, especially adept at math. But to avoid escalating chaos at home, he began smoking marijuana and staying out late. Eventually, he dropped out of high school.

“I fell apart,” he recalled. An impulsive car theft at age 17 was a “turning point,” he said. Shird and two friends came upon a shiny new Lincoln Continental with the motor running, keys in the ignition and no one inside. The driver, they figured, was visiting someone in a nearby house. Shird hopped in and took the wheel. An inexperienced driver, he quickly lost control of the hulking vehicle and collided with several parked cars. Panicked, the teenagers stripped the Lincoln of whatever they could find and fled.

Among the things they took was a paper bag with close to \$2,000 in cash, some tucked into church tithe envelopes. “We could have returned the money,” Shird wrote in a memoir. “We could have just put it back in the car and left it somewhere.”

Why didn’t they? “We were poor, like we couldn’t put food back,” Shird told me. “We were hungry. I’d never seen that much money in my whole life.”

He indulged in Air Jordans but used most of the cash to launch himself as a teenage marijuana dealer. Cocaine and heroin followed, and he eventually ran a ring with some 20 employees.

Shird now regards those early years and the decades that followed as having caused a kind of post-traumatic stress, similar to what battlefield soldiers experience. Researchers and mental health professionals also recognize that same pattern of distress in children exposed to persistent poverty and crime.

“There’s no question that living in a place with a lot of trauma and violence is not healthy,” said Shawn Bushway, an economics professor at the University at Albany and a researcher with the RAND Corporation. “It leads to negative consequences that spiral and accumulate and cause harm.”

Shird has become an evangelist for this view and for policies that alleviate the pain and anger such trauma triggers. He once dreamed of becoming a lawyer, even a cop, but knew that he was heading down a dead end. “Everybody knows ... (drug dealing) is wrong,” he has written. “Even in the movies, the drug dealer never rides off into the sunset.”

But for poor kids, the economics and peer pressure make hustling irresistible, he told me.

His math skills and leadership ability, along with a willingness to resort to violence, brought him financial security for the first time. Filet mignon in fancy restaurants replaced the peanut butter sandwiches that were sometimes all his mother could offer for dinner.

Shird carried a gun and used it. “I’m not a guy who messes with you,” he said. “I’ve given some guys hell, but I’ve never been a predator.”

IT CAN BE HARD TO reconcile the soft-spoken, deliberative man I met by chance last fall on a bench at the Santa Monica Pier with the person Shird once was. Seeing the ocean soothes him, he said, so he drives west often from his Fairfax apartment.

Shird served three separate prison terms, but he quickly went back to dealing after his first and second releases. During the last and longest stretch behind bars — seven years — he felt something shift.

Prison had given him time and space to reflect. “When it’s quiet, you hear yourself better,” he said.

Always disciplined, he became a daily runner, practiced yoga and Islam, and began to prepare for life on the outside with prison courses on navigating re-entry.

He came to see his past in a harsh light. “What a hypocrite I had become,” he wrote in *Lessons of Redemption*, the memoir of his street life and time in prison. “I was making money off these people — selling them a substance I hated.”

Quiet also brought the trauma of his early life and the violence of his street life to the surface.

Shird remembered how anger and hatred exploded into a shootout in broad daylight. He and another heroin dealer fired at each other at least 10 times and missed every time.

“I realized how stupid it was,” he said, recalling how he had teared up at the memory. “I was crying because I could have killed some innocent person, and I’d still be in prison.”

On another occasion, witnessing a man being murdered at close range in a nightclub so shook him that he has since avoided clubs.

When a therapist told him that he had PTSD from his exposure to violence, he understood himself in a new way.

He started to write. “It changed my life. All the pain bottled up in you is no longer bottled up. You have control. You can shut the book, throw away the paper.”

Age also helps men like Shird change, said Bushway, the Albany university professor and researcher.

“They may have more arthritis in their left knee, less energy, whatever,” Bushway said. But perhaps more determinative is that people change their perception of themselves.

“They decide they want a different life, and then consciously take steps to act differently.”

SHIRD LEFT PRISON FOR THE last time in 2006. He landed at a Baltimore halfway house.

Moses Hammett soon paid a visit. Hammett was a mentor with the Baltimore-based non-profit Center for Urban Families, where he ran a re-entry program.

Shird quickly impressed Hammett. “I’ve seen very few returning citizens that had the commitment to change the way Kevin did.”

Thomasina Hiers, a vice president with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, calls him a “thought partner” in her efforts to link “trusted adults” and at-risk young people.

During the Obama administration, Shird worked with other non-profit groups helping White House officials craft federal policy on clemency and drug trafficking.

In 2016, the mayor of Baltimore named him to a task force on heroin treatment and prevention. Speaking engagements followed.

“One of the things I really respect about Kevin,” Hiers said, “is how he’s taken his experience and used it as teachable moments to help others.”

Shird’s writing now extends beyond his personal story.

In *The Colored Waiting Room*, published in 2018, he recounts the 1950s and ’60s civil rights movement through the eyes of co-author Nelson Malden. Now 89, Malden still runs his family’s barbershop in a Montgomery, Ala., hotel.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a regular customer during those years.

Shird and Malden have appeared together before audiences to discuss their book.

Wes Moore, Maryland’s new governor and Shird’s longtime friend, publicly lauded the book, calling it “an important exploration of our past and a roadmap for our future.”

Shird moved to L.A. in 2022, to turn his books into films. *The Colored Waiting Room* is at the top of his list. Ask him, and he’ll pull out his phone and show you a pitch deck he has made to interest movie producers.

“There’s no question that living in a place with a lot of trauma and violence is not healthy.”

Soon after his release, Shird found work at a call center and then at a mortgage company. He stayed involved with the Center for Urban Families and eventually became a mentor himself.

“I saw the passion of him working with young people and telling stories,” Hammett said. Shird aspired to be the sort of adult role model that he didn’t have.

The mentoring and writing expanded Shird’s audience and network, which led to a deeper engagement on the issues he cared most about.

Shird recently finished *A Life for a Life*, a book exploring the impact of trauma and violence on young people and identifying policies that he believes would help them. The book is scheduled for publication next year, and he is working on a companion podcast.

Shird knows Hollywood’s long odds. But he has the confidence of someone who has come a long way, slowly.

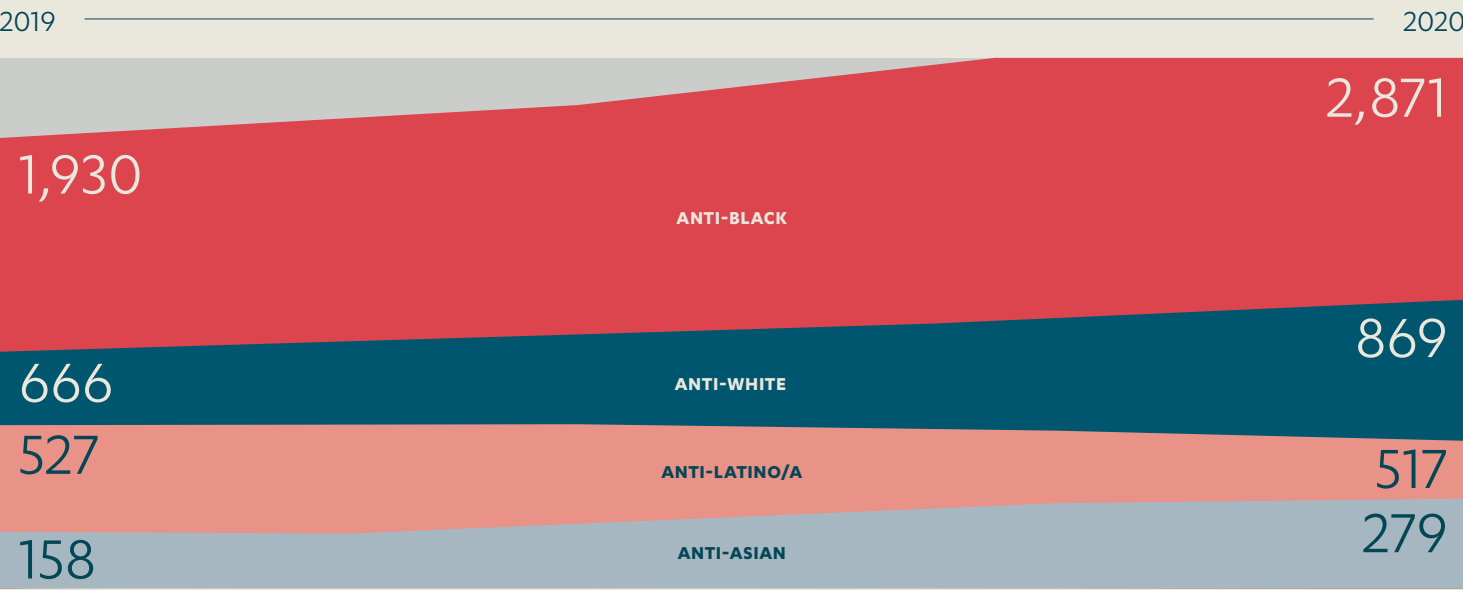
“I’m going to win an Oscar one day,” he told me quietly. ►

Hatred in America

We all feel it — the coursing of hatred through American society. It is part of our politics and our culture. We see it in protests, bump up against it in social media. Measuring it can be difficult, but some signs are unmistakable. Here, some reminders of how it is warping our lives.

Hate Crime

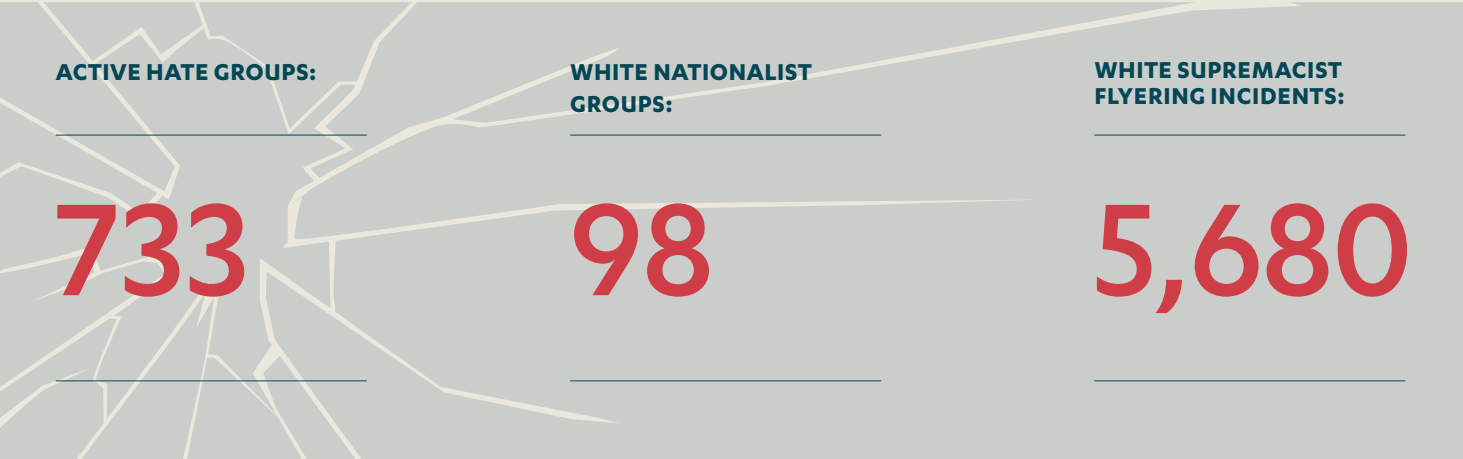
The most visceral and damaging expression of hatred is found in violence, and by that measure, hatred is fearsomely on the rise. Below, hate crimes, by race, between 2019 and 2020.



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Hate Groups

Tracking hate groups in America has long been the work of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which has chronicled the acts of hatred committed by the Ku Klux Klan, the Proud Boys, Patriot Front and other White nationalist organizations, as well as through the acts and statements of politicians and candidates across the country. Its regularly updated national map locates the work of those groups and individuals. Nationally, America’s recent history includes:

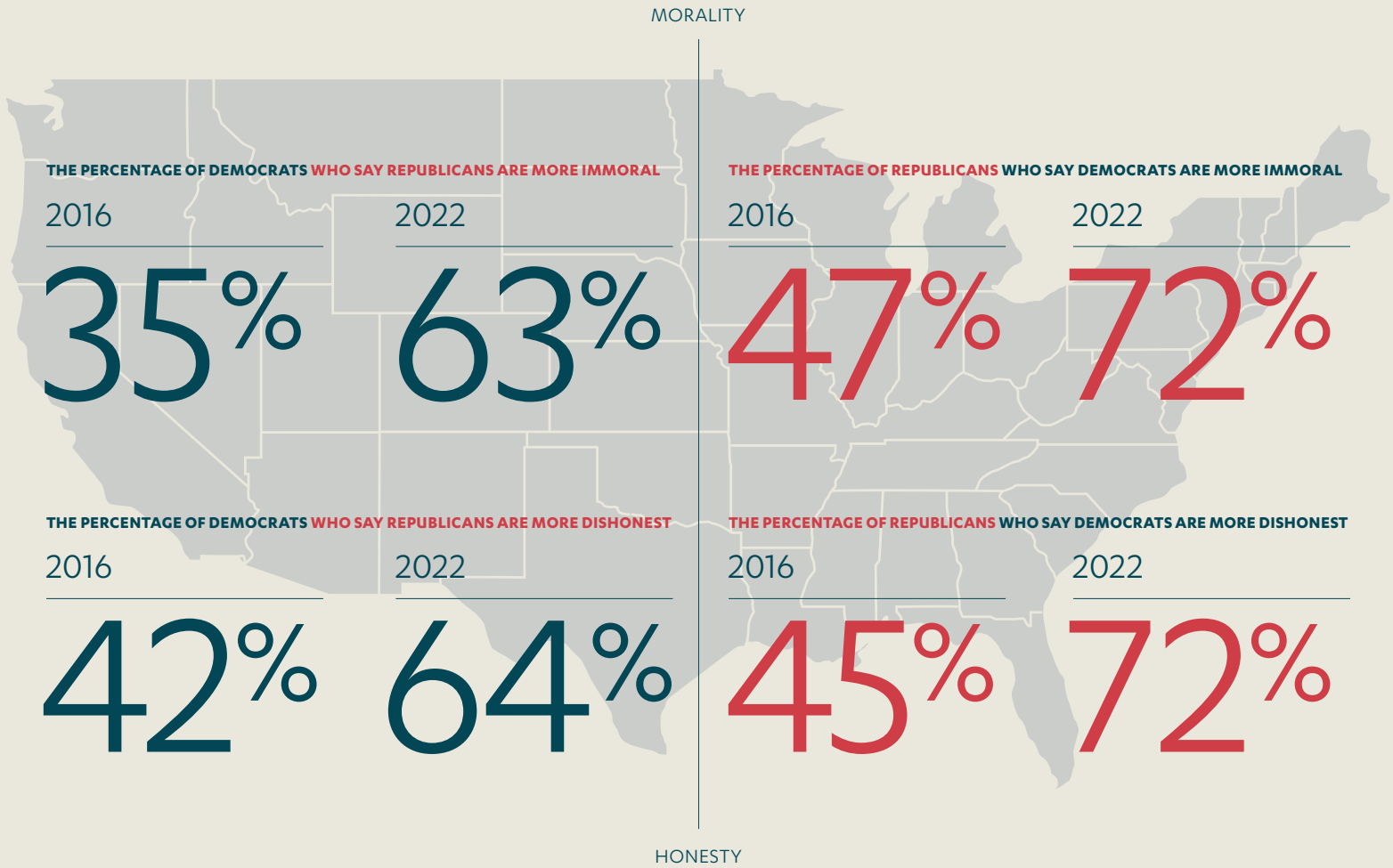
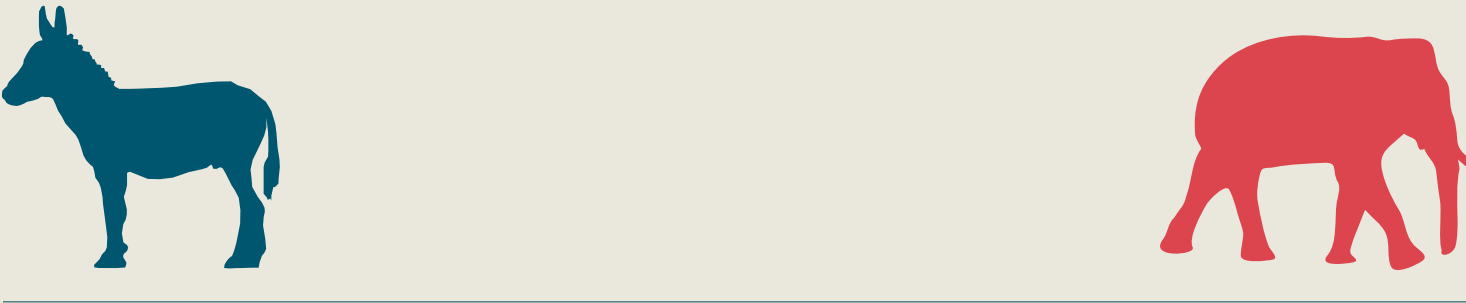


Source: Southern Poverty Law Center

Across the Divide

Partisan division is hardly news. But division has taken on darker tones in recent years, with members of both parties viewing those in the opposite party as not just incorrect about issues but as fundamentally lesser people. Majorities of both parties now see their opposites as more closed-minded, immoral, dishonest and unintelligent than most Americans.

Below, a snapshot of two criteria, honesty and morality:



Source: August 2022 poll by the Pew Research Center

RACE AND NATIONALISM

The Fallacies of “Scientific” Racism

WRITTEN BY
LISA FUNG

“AFRICANS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED A DIFFERENT SPECIES,” declared a writer on the message board.

“All of the races descend from a single COMMON TO ALL population some 50,000 ago (Europeans, Asians, Australians, Americans). All except Africans ...,” the writer continued, dropping words while using the language of science to make a point.

“Those are different species.”

For Aaron Panofsky and Kushan Dasgupta, posts like this on Stormfront, the White nationalist Internet forum, and on other online neo-Nazi message boards hold the key to understanding how and why White supremacist groups appropriate scientific research — in particular about genetics and biology — to advance their ideas, viewpoints and agendas of hate.

Panofsky, a UCLA professor of public policy and director of the Institute for Society and Genetics, and Dasgupta, a postdoctoral fellow at the institute, have spent countless hours scrutinizing White nationalist discussion boards, as well as blogs and online magazines, first as part of a National Institutes of Health study, and now as part of UCLA’s new Initiative to Study Hate.

“One of the things we wanted to study was how the emotive, emotional discourse of hate was being used by these people who are doing ‘science talk,’” Panofsky said. “When is science being connected to hate and when is it not? When is science connected to more emotional aspects of hateful nationalist discourse?”

Often the science discussion revolves around how genetics “proves” that Blacks and Whites are fundamentally different from each other, he said. “They’re not just saying, ‘We don’t like these people,’ or ‘The Bible says.’ They’re very frequently trying to mobilize science talk to say White people are burdened by Black people and Latinos in society.”

At the heart of the study is how science is used as a tool to dehumanize or delegitimize members of another group. “There might be a string of logic where the science is used to ‘prove’ that some group should be treated as less than human. That then justifies emotional, hateful responses,” Panofsky said. “That unleashes hate on that lessened, dehumanized, subhuman group.”

For example, White nationalists have argued that science “proved that people of African ancestry were not adapted to being civilized, that interracial relationships would lead to unfit offspring, and that’s why we have to have anti-miscegenation rules and why we need to keep them suppressed and contained,” he said. “That’s one of the historic pathways by which science dehumanized and then led to hate. What we want to know is: Is that pattern still holding?”

CENTRAL TO PANOFSKY AND DASGUPTA’S research is Stormfront, the oldest and largest White nationalist Internet forum, with nearly 375,000 registered members and more than 14 million posts. The site was founded in the 1990s by Don Black, a former Ku Klux Klan leader and self-proclaimed “racialist.” The Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights law firm in Montgomery, Ala., has called Stormfront “a magnet and breeding ground for the deadly and the deranged” and labeled it the “murder capital of the Internet.”

While there are numerous pro-White chat groups and online message boards, magazines and blogs, Panofsky and Dasgupta opted to focus on public-facing sites that are open to anyone. Stormfront has a “deep historical archive,” Panofsky said, “and it’s all available. It’s threaded discussions, and these discussions sometimes go on for years.”

Not all Stormfront posts deal with race — or hate. There are sections identified as Poetry and Creative Writing, Health and Fitness, Music and Entertainment, and Dating Advice, as well as a forum labeled Science and Technology. Discussions linked to science and hate can spring up almost anywhere on the site.

Because of the way Stormfront is set up, the researchers are unable to use data-mining techniques to scrape the site for relevant posts. That means tracking conversations must be done manually, as the researchers cast a wide net to uncover ways in which aspects of science pervade everyday conversations.

“Sometimes they have science and technology conversations that are literally about clean energy and stuff like that,” Dasgupta said. “I’m not sure why they’re having it with one another on this type of message board rather than somewhere else, but we are trying to study when, from the everyday vantage point of a White nationalist, science becomes salient to their thinking, and when it is not salient to their thinking.”

Panofsky and Dasgupta are studying interchanges in Stormfront’s science and technology forum, but they’ve started looking at other forums that are not science-specific to see how such assumptions make their way into regular conversation. Participants on Stormfront engage in “rational” debates — “rational in the sense that it’s rational from their perspective,” Dasgupta said — on any number of topics, including science-laced discussions about the role of women in White nationalism.

“This is where a lot of misogyny comes into play,” he said. “At what point is their belief about women something that’s just based on tradition, religion and those types of things, or are they starting to ground their ideas about the role of women in scientific thinking — biological stuff like hormones, or evolutionary theories. Things like, ‘They are just not as smart in IQ testing.’”

Stormfront’s guidelines warn against advocating or suggesting any activity that is illegal under U.S. law and urge members to “keep discussions civil and productive.” That includes, for example, not using profanity and racial epithets. “Make an effort to use proper spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization (no ALL-CAPS posts).”

For White nationalists, these simple rules of decorum are important.

“Part of what we’re discovering is that these people are so invested in science because they’re afraid of being irrational,” Dagupta said. “Fear of irrationality is a big part of their belief system. As emboldened as some of these extremists might present themselves, their fear of being seen as not rational is on some level really paralyzing to them.”

“They want to get away from that label, ‘You’re just a crazy racist,’” Panofsky added.

“Right,” Dasgupta said. “As long as they’re a justified racist, that’s much more meaningful to them.”

“One of the things we wanted to study was how the emotive, emotional discourse of hate was being used by these people who are doing ‘science talk.’”

— Aaron Panofsky, UCLA professor of public policy and director of the Institute for Society and Genetics

THE PANOFSKY AND DASGUPTA PROJECT is one of 23 selected for UCLA’s Initiative to Study Hate, a three-year pilot program led by David Myers, a distinguished professor of history and director of the Luskin Center for History and Policy.

“What a world that they’ve uncovered: the deployment of scientific idiom to garb or cloak these racist sensibilities,” Myers said of Panofsky and Dasgupta.

The Initiative to Study Hate, launched in late 2022 with a \$3 million contribution from an anonymous donor, brings together UCLA researchers from all corners of the campus whose diverse projects share a common goal: exploring the genesis of hate and, ultimately, looking for ways to combat it.

The projects tackle wide-ranging subjects that include the effects of bullying and the criminal justice system on LGBTQ+ youth; the dehumanization of people experiencing homelessness; the link between biases against undocumented immigrants and deportation or legalization status; and racist hate speech in high schools.

Research teams meet monthly — a grant requirement — to share insights, ideas and feedback. “We’re trying to create a community of scholars that works together,” Myers said. “While encouraging autonomy and individual discretion, we really want to marshal the powers of these individual teams and create something grander than the work of any single one of them. This is an experiment of bringing together researchers out of the silos to which we are conditioned and dwell in.”

OTHER STUDIES HAVE INVESTIGATED THE role of science in society. The Panofsky and Dasgupta project is unique because it focuses on efforts that involve the use of science to validate messages of hate. The researchers are focused on how these groups use science in conjunction with other aspects of their belief system.

“This is a movement in which science is very central to their belief system, going back to the history of World War II and Nazi eugenics. ... There’s often an emphasis on science,” Dasgupta said. “While it’s central to their outlook on the world, it’s not necessarily always the first thing someone will mention in an argument, but it might be something that eventually gets folded into the argument.”

Although their research is still in its early stages, Panofsky and Dasgupta see practical applications for their findings. Understanding how hate groups use science to further their agendas will help dismantle their arguments.

“It’s easier to challenge these ideas, or at least talk about them in a much more intelligible and even responsible way, if we just know the variety of ways in which hate is articulated, rather than assuming that hate has just one clear, discernable meaning,” Dasgupta said. “One of the big outcomes of this project is, hopefully, that it gives people a much more multifaceted understanding of extremism.”

Sometimes, White nationalist communities mask their hatred in denials, rejecting the idea that they are spewing hate. “They’ll say, ‘We don’t hate people,’ ‘We’re not hateful; we just want nothing to do with those people,’” Dasgupta said. “Other times they’ll say things

“What a world that they’ve uncovered: the deployment of scientific idiom to garb or cloak these racist sensibilities.”

— David Myers, distinguished professor of history and director of the Luskin Center for History and Policy, on the Panofsky and Dasgupta Project

like, ‘We’re not hateful, it’s the rest of the world that is trying to get us to hate our White identity.’”

Wrapped in these denials are often distortions or misinterpretations of scientific research to fit the argument of the hate they are advancing. White nationalists might, for example, falsify numbers, or use partial statistics to make a point while claiming that academics are “getting it wrong.”

“Sometimes it is out-and-out falsification. Sometimes it’s strategic amplification of a story. Sometimes it’s decontextualization, removing the exculpatory information,” Panofsky said. “And sometimes it’s more subtle misdescriptions and then an argument on top of that, like, ‘Oh, when those UCLA scientists tell you correlation does not equal causation, they’re just saying that to confuse the real, direct story that you can see right here on the page if you just look.’”

The concern, Panofsky said, is how curious young people might read message boards and be swayed into thinking the arguments are legitimate.

“One of the things we have been watching with dismay is the way that these White nationalist groups package scientific misinformation for consumption and distribution,” he said. “If we’re going to either debunk or challenge this, it probably won’t be [by] targeting the people themselves, but it will be [by] pricking the imprimatur of sophistication or of legitimacy in the aims of those folks.”

Panofsky and Dasgupta are trying to tease out and re-theorize what constitutes “hate.” Much of the content they have seen is focused on demonization, either of Afro-descended peoples or women.

“That’s one way of thinking about how they’re hateful. But some of these are also re-narrated or commented upon [by] others in a factual tone of voice, which doesn’t have the emotive quality that we associate with hate,” Dasgupta said. “Does that mean they’re not hateful? We don’t have an answer to this yet, because this is what we’re trying to figure out how to answer.

“But it helps convey how the study of hate is considerably more challenging than we might think at first glance.” ▀

WHEN HATRED BEGETS HATRED: RACIAL BIAS AND SUICIDE

WRITTEN BY
KAT SCHUSTER

ILLUSTRATION BY NOMA BAR



SUICIDE RATES AMONG BLACK YOUTH have been rising for decades, but they have seldom been a primary focus of research. That’s an oversight whose consequences Jocelyn Meza, a licensed clinician who works with suicidal children, has witnessed firsthand.

“We’ve had so many teens tell us, for example, that they have experienced a lot of discrimination,” Meza said. “And those experiences of discrimination make them feel like they don’t belong in the world.”

Meza has teamed up with Adrian Flores, who specializes in gender and women’s studies, for a yearlong study that probes a dispiriting hypothesis: that racial bias damages young people and further racial bias has clouded research into the problem. Their work, titled “The Racial Violence of Suicide: Decolonizing Suicide Prevention for Black Youth,” was launched last fall.

They approach those questions from their own backgrounds. Flores holds a doctorate in gender and women’s studies and has an Emerging Voices Fellowship with the American Council of Learned Societies. Meza actively works with suicidal youth at the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. She’s also an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences.

Meza has been researching suicide prevention since 2012 and has worked with suicidal children and adolescents, often in emergency-rooms, for six years. She sees many teenagers, but some of the patients in her clinic are as young as 8 years old.

Unlike Meza, Flores doesn’t have a background in psychology or psychiatry. For the past nine years, he has studied psychoanalytic theory, literature and philosophy to examine how suicide has been understood in Western society. To their collaboration, he brings deep research into the nature and history of suicide.

The pair met at a postdoctoral fellowship retreat last year, and they discovered that their respective areas of research could intersect when it comes to addressing the issue of suicide among Black youth.

Their study aims to challenge modern treatments that ignore the intersection of race and childhood despair, and to unravel a historic negligence in the way suicide among Black youth has been reported and understood.

The most disturbing trend, cited in their abstract, suggests that suicide rates are two times higher among Black children, from ages 5 to 12, than their White counterparts. Another striking finding: Boys accounted for more of these deaths than girls, according to the same study, led by one of Meza’s mentors, Arielle Sheftall.

Meza and Flores seek explanations for alarming statistics like these and explore whether they have been shrouded all along beneath biased data collection.

THE TERM “SUICIDE” WAS COINED in the 1600s in England. Flores argues that its meaning has been racialized “from the get-go.” Its original application suggested that self-inflicted deaths were of two types, and that those types reflected a way to “delineate the difference between the civilized and the primitive...the civilized and the uncivilized.”

In that conception, only “civilized” people were granted the sophistication — or the humanity — to consider ending their own lives. Black people, by contrast, were seen as lacking the capacity to commit suicide, Flores said, though plenty of evidence makes clear that they did just that.

Those assumptions continue to haunt research in this area.

“People tend to think that people of color have a lower rate of suicide, Black people specifically,” Flores said. “We see those legacies still being played out—even in the study and how statistics are being gathered.”

Suicide ideation among young children is also an area that isn’t well understood. In fact, Flores said, it’s even been thought of as “absurd.” When you add the variable of race, or the consideration of Black children, far less is known.

The result, he said, is that current suicide statistics may not accurately depict the suicide crisis among Black children. He says that coroners, for instance, may treat drug overdoses by White children as evidence of suicide while regarding similar circumstances for Black children as accidents. He says implicit bias may be to blame.

Deaths can be misclassified if the teenager or child did not have a prior mental health diagnosis that can be accessed in a medical chart, or otherwise documented. Unless there is a suicide note, deaths are often classified as “other,” Meza said.

That carries over into the way doctors and others respond. According to Meza, 11 treatments for suicidal patients have been tested in the past 60 to 80 years. Out of those, just one addresses race. The majority, she said, were developed and tested on patients from White, middle-class homes.

“That’s another significant barrier that I think has not been addressed: How do we actually integrate ways of coping with or resisting racism into our treatments?” Meza said.

“WE’VE HAD SO MANY TEENS TELL US THAT THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED A LOT OF DISCRIMINATION.”

“THEY’RE GETTING THESE ACTIVE MESSAGES FROM SOCIAL MEDIA, FROM WHAT THEY SEE ON TV — THAT THEY DON’T MATTER, THAT THEIR LIVES DON’T MATTER.”

YOUNG PATIENTS OFTEN FIRST PRESENT their troubles to a doctor in an emergency room. For many, even those who arrive in great distress, the process consists of completing a brief safety plan and then being discharged.

“Then once they go back into the community,” Meza said, “they don’t get that continued follow-up care because they fall through the cracks.”

In part, that reflects a cultural unwillingness to confront the toll that emotional stress can exact, even on young children.

Meza said the No. 1 roadblock to helping young people in Black communities is the lack of validation of their own despair. Many children who come from historically marginalized communities do not have a lot of the vocabulary to talk about mental health, she said.

“A lot of youth don’t necessarily see their struggles as a problem. Especially if they’ve seen their parents struggle, and their parents never received care,” she said. “There’s a lot of stigma that gets in the way of them recognizing that their struggles are valid, and that they need help.”

The second biggest barrier comes after the decision to seek help. Children of low-income households, particularly with some family members who may be in the country illegally, come up against difficulties immediately: How will they get rides to a local clinic? Who will pay for their care? Are they willing to confide in doctors they have never met and may not trust?

“Generally, there’s a lot of mistrust in the medical field because of how a lot of Black families have been treated in medical settings — mistreated, I should say,” Meza said.

One promising therapy for children and adolescents is known as dialectical behavior therapy, or DBT. Meza is trained in this therapy, which involves months of treatment for both the child and his or her family. The good news is there is enough evidence to show that it is effective, Meza said. The bad news is that DBT is expensive and time-consuming — patients typically require at least four hours a week for six months. On top of that, there are only a handful of clinics in California that offer DBT.

Treatment is hard to get partly because many doctors and clinics are reluctant to engage with emotionally troubled children.

“A lot of clinicians are so afraid to treat suicide,” Meza said.

“For example, if you’re working with a 15-year-old and the kid is telling you, you know, that they’re highly suicidal and that they have a plan and you don’t do anything to protect them? Yeah, of course you’re liable, especially if you don’t report it to the parents.”

THE OBSERVATIONS UNDERScoreD BY MEZA AND FLORES, even in their preliminary phase of research, already pull the curtain back on disparities that are keeping swaths of Black children suspended in hopelessness — undiagnosed, or diagnosed but unable to access care. In the worst cases, those disparities can be fatal.

Meza and Flores hope that research can point to treatment options that address race while also purging existing treatments of racial bias.

Unwilling to wait for that day, they are already exploring ideas for raising awareness of these problems and targeting institutions that may help save the lives of young Black children. They are reaching out to institutions such as Black churches, for instance, because they are local fixtures and trusted within their communities. To them, the message is that racial bias is harming young people and that thoughts of suicide can begin far earlier than many people suspected.

Suicide ideation can begin in children who are as young as 5 years old, around the time they begin to grasp the finality of death. The ages 14 to 24 are still considered to be the highest risk period for suicide attempts. But Meza said she’s now seeing increases in suicide attempts in children under 13 years old.

As younger and younger children can access the world through computers and cellphones, the risks are expected to grow. “They’re getting these active messages from social media, from what they see on TV—that they don’t matter, that their lives don’t matter,” Meza said.

Hatred finds its way into those young lives, and history suggests that it will do its damage once it does. For these researchers, the hope is that new study and attention will alert adults — social workers, doctors, educators, pastors and, of course, parents — to cast aside old assumptions and respond with the care these children need to save their lives. ▀

Media Extremism

Does TV 'News' Lead to Violence? Two Researchers
Look at Fox News

WRITTEN BY
MADDIE DINOWITZ

POLITICAL EXTREMISM HAS BECOME AN all-too-familiar aspect of American society. From angry tweets penned by politicians to polarizing clips that seem almost satirical, a growing sense of bilateral nationalism is gripping the country. Office holders and candidates pose with guns, use targets in campaign literature, threaten the lives of opponents. Hatred for the other side is becoming not only amplified but normalized.

And anger and extremism are not confined to politics: Hate courses just as thickly through the bloodstream of American media as it does through the rest of the nation's life. Readers and viewers choose their news outlets less for information than for ideological reinforcement idolizing newscasters as they do sports teams.

But which one ignited the fire? Do the media simply shine a light on extremism through their reporting? Or is it possible that the media are actively encouraging extremism, profiting by it and shaping national attitudes toward it? The relationship between mass media and extremism recalls the chicken and the egg. Which begets the other?

Brett McCully, an assistant professor of economics at Collegio Carlo Alberto in Italy, and Jun Luo, a third-year Ph.D. student in the UCLA Communication Studies department, are studying the relationship between hatred and media. Under the UCLA Initiative to Study Hate, McCully and Luo are setting out to explore a question with disturbing implications: Does exposure to partisan media drive radicalization?

There is already evidence that viewing Fox News affects the behavior of its audience in ways connected to politics.

THE TEAM IS IN ITS early stages of data collection, meaning that it will be months before the researchers are prepared to report any conclusions. To begin, they have collected the wealth of research that tracks the relationship between mass media and political outcomes. How, for instance, does coverage of candidates and campaigns affect the results of elections?

Many studies have established that connection, demonstrating that the media fuel partisan voting, so it seems natural to wonder whether the media affect other types of political behavior — in this case, extremist behavior. Could it be that coverage helps viewers not only decide how to cast ballots but also whether to engage in violence?

“While it wasn’t like a lightning-bolt moment, I just realized — maybe trying to fall asleep one night — that these topics could really work together,” McCully said. So he and Luo decided to extend their scope into a broader study of cable news channels and extremism. They applied for UCLA’s research initiative.

The team has one mission, at least for now: to understand if the conservative media coax viewers to engage in extremism. They had to find a “natural experiment” that would help them break down cause and effect.

TO FIND HOW EACH ACT of extremism relates to media viewership, McCully and Luo propose two strategies.

First will be an analysis of the staggered rollout of new right-wing cable channels. Since 2014, channels such as Blaze and Newsmax have come online and begun broadcasting through cable providers. McCully and Luo will contrast hate-crime prevalence in countries with access to these new channels to the prevalence in countries without access across the past several years to see if there is a difference.

Then the researchers will turn to Fox News, employing a novel way of assessing its influence. The notion is that viewers are more likely to tune into a channel with a lower channel number within their cable system. McCully and Luo will divide the nation by counties, separating those that carry Fox News on a low channel position from those that carry it higher on the dial. In theory, those counties with low channel positions for the network will expose more viewers to its contents. The challenge, then, will be to see if those counties also experience higher levels of hatred.

There is already evidence that viewing Fox News affects the behavior of its audience in ways connected to politics. Previous studies have demonstrated, for instance, that Fox News watchers were less likely than viewers of CNN or MSNBC to receive COVID vaccines (studies also have shown, perhaps not coincidentally, that Republicans have died at higher rates than Democrats from COVID). Might a similar effect be at work politically? The research team hypothesizes that viewers who are exposed to right-wing

media, including Fox News, will veer further to the right, affecting not only how they view conventional politics, but also inducing extremist behavior as well.

The effects may not be direct, and, of course, the vast majority of Fox News viewers do not resort to hatred or violence. But McCully and Luo are examining the possibility that conservative cable channels serve as a “gateway drug” to the larger far-right ecosystem. The researchers hope to determine whether watching a station such as Fox News may catalyze individuals into exploring more extremist ideology across the Internet and in mass media.

It’s important to note that there is no reason to believe that the effects would be limited to Fox News or conservatives. While initially emphasizing right-wing programming and ideology, McCully and Luo hope to venture into left-wing media as well. They are starting with the right because so much extremist activity is concentrated there. According to the Anti-Defamation League, right-wing extremists are responsible for 75% of extremist-related murders in the last decade.

And of course, it was right-wing extremism that was responsible for the most notorious act of political violence in recent years, the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. “We think it’s important,” McCully added, “to understand the effect of mass media beyond simply its effects on electoral outcomes.”

THE PAIR OF RESEARCHERS KNEW each other long before joining in this project. Luo was searching for a public policy internship when she stumbled upon McCully in the economics department, working on a broad research project surrounding extremism. After some trial and error, McCully and Luo recognized that mass media would be a compelling angle for their studies and began to tackle the project they’re working on today.

It is a departure for McCully, who specializes in international economics. The matter-of-fact former UCLA Ph.D. student acknowledged that the study of media was new to him, and said he was grateful to be working with Luo, a communications Ph.D. student. For her part, Luo said she finds the methodology of the project tilted toward economics. Playfully describing the project as “communications with a bit of a political science flavor,” the researchers agree that it makes use of both of their talents.

They are collaborating despite geographical separation. Luo works out of Los Angeles while McCully is located in northern Italy. They juggle statistical regressions and preliminary findings, connecting across a nine-hour time difference.

FOR THEIR ULTIMATE FINDINGS TO have meaning, the researchers needed to settle on some of the specifics of what they are looking for. It was, for instance, up to the team to define the notion of “hatred,” as well as “extremism.”

“‘Hate’ is such a broad term. And to be honest, it is sometimes hard to measure,” Luo said. “In a new initiative, we also have a group of people discussing the concept itself. There are a lot of different dimensions. You could say it’s an emotion, or it’s an opinion, or it could be just an actual action or a consequential result.”

The research team seeks to measure hatred in three ways: hate crimes, hate groups, and hate actions.

The first subset, hate crimes, will be measured by analyzing local police reports submitted to the FBI. These are compiled into Uniform Crime Reports and aggregated at the county level. McCully and Luo are focusing on counts of hate crimes in specific geographic areas as opposed to investigating individual events.

Regarding hate groups, the researchers will rely on the work of the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit organization that monitors extremists throughout the United States. Using groups identified by the center as known purveyors of hatred, the researchers will match the selected hate groups to their respective counties; this will guide the team in drawing conclusions about the geographic spread of hate groups and their relationship to media exposure.

Lastly, there are hate actions. Again, Luo and McCully intend to build on the work of others, in this case the Anti-Defamation League. The league catalogs hate actions — not all of them crimes — and that database will provide the core of the material that Luo and McCully rely upon. If an individual partakes in antisemitic leafleting through a hate group, for instance, his or her actions would be reported to the Anti-Defamation League and thus qualify as a hate action, McCully said, even though that activity would likely not constitute a hate crime.

TO COUPLE THEIR FINDINGS OF extremism with media viewership, McCully and Luo observe data from Nielsen Media. This database shares information on audience viewership. Particularly useful for this project, it highlights different accounts of how many people are watching right-wing cable television and where.

Comparing viewership numbers to hate crimes, groups or actions may yield intriguing

leads, but connecting the two — demonstrating that watching a particular network actually leads a viewer to engage in hatred — is a more difficult proposition.

To better grasp the causal relationship, McCully lays out an example. There could be high Fox News viewership in a city where several hate crimes have been recorded. But the crimes may be attributable to other factors — a history of local racism, a recent incident that inflamed tensions. This might drive people to prefer Fox News rather than to be motivated by it, inverting the causal connection between hatred and viewership. So the research team intends to look at exposure to Fox News that is unrelated to those other potential causes or factors that might be driving hate crimes.

“For that, we follow other researchers who’ve already looked at the effects of Fox News on voting outcomes. If Fox News Channel is channel No. 1 on your cable system, then that should lead to a lot more viewership than if the channel number of Fox News is 2000,” McCully said. The channel position works as a tool to ensure that the researchers are underscoring the “true” impact of watching Fox News on extremism.

ONCE THE DATA IS IN hand, it will be up to the researchers to make sense of it. The goal, McCully and Luo said, is to go beyond presenting the shows and networks favored by hateful people and instead be able to point to the media messages that may encourage that hatred. The actual numbers of people so affected may be very small, they cautioned, but small numbers can nevertheless account for a great deal of violence and intimidation.

“Extremist activity tends to be very rare in the population,” McCully said. “So if it’s happening for even a sliver of people, given how many millions watch these channels ... that would still be socially and politically salient.”

The pervasiveness of mass media is often taken for granted. McCully and Luo hope that by studying its relationship to extremism, researchers may better understand not just the ubiquity of media but its power as well — in this case, its power to inflame and encourage hatred. ▀

“‘Hate’ is such a broad term. And to be honest, it is sometimes hard to measure.”

— Jun Luo, UCLA Communication Studies department

FOX NEWS HEADQUARTERS IN MIDTOWN MANHATTAN ON FEBRUARY 17, 2021.



School Daze

New Report Examines How Post-Pandemic Hatred and Intolerance Are Harming Public Education

WRITTEN BY
JON REGARDIE

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 on American public education has been devastating. Classes conducted via Zoom caused learning loss for many students. Children suddenly devoid of peer interaction endured mental health challenges and an erosion of social skills. Teachers who had long provided extra attention to struggling kids were left frustrated at the far end of an Internet connection.

Classes are back in session, but schools across the country have encountered another insidious effect of the pandemic — a staggering rise in intolerance and hatred, particularly around issues of race and LGBTQ+ acceptance. A national political divide has bled from cable news programs and social media down into public high school classrooms, with the most impactful effects in politically divided “purple” communities, according to a recent report published by UCLA and UC Riverside researchers.

The education system has never operated in a blissful vacuum, of course, and teenagers have forever been directing mean-spirited invective at classmates.

But the rhetoric has recently intensified, and the development of critical thinking skills crucial to the high school experience is being undermined in an atmosphere where misinformation is growing and the window for honest discussion and debate is narrowing.

“Critical thinking means exploring issues without fear, exploring issues that sometimes are difficult to explore,” said Austin Beutner, a former superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District. “When political forces make that harder in schools, they are harming kids, or harming the nature of education they get.”

The issue is spelled out in “Educating for a Diverse Democracy: The Chilling Role of Political Conflict in Blue, Purple, and Red Communities.” The 49-page report, published in November, was written by John Rogers, a UCLA professor and director of the university’s Institute for Democracy, Education and Access, and Joseph Kahne, a professor of education and co-director of the Civic Engagement Research Group at UC Riverside.

As with so many segments of society, the state of American education was battered by the COVID-19 pandemic, whose effect on learning in public schools was deep and wide. In November, the California Department of Education released test scores that had dropped across the board in English and math. Students in low-income households were hit especially hard. Declines were attributed to economic hardships caused by parents contracting COVID, losing jobs, or dying. Technology challenges made distance learning even more difficult.

LAUSD schools confronted all of those issues and more. Despite an ambitious program to give every student an Internet device and reliable service, test scores showed that a preponderance of them failed to meet grade-level standards for

either English or math. Scores in those areas dropped to their lowest levels in five years even as teachers handed out higher grades.

Elsewhere in the nation, culture wars added to the challenge. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin were among officials who sought to rein in what could be taught in schools. Partisan-driven disagreements about curriculum and parent involvement became a norm.

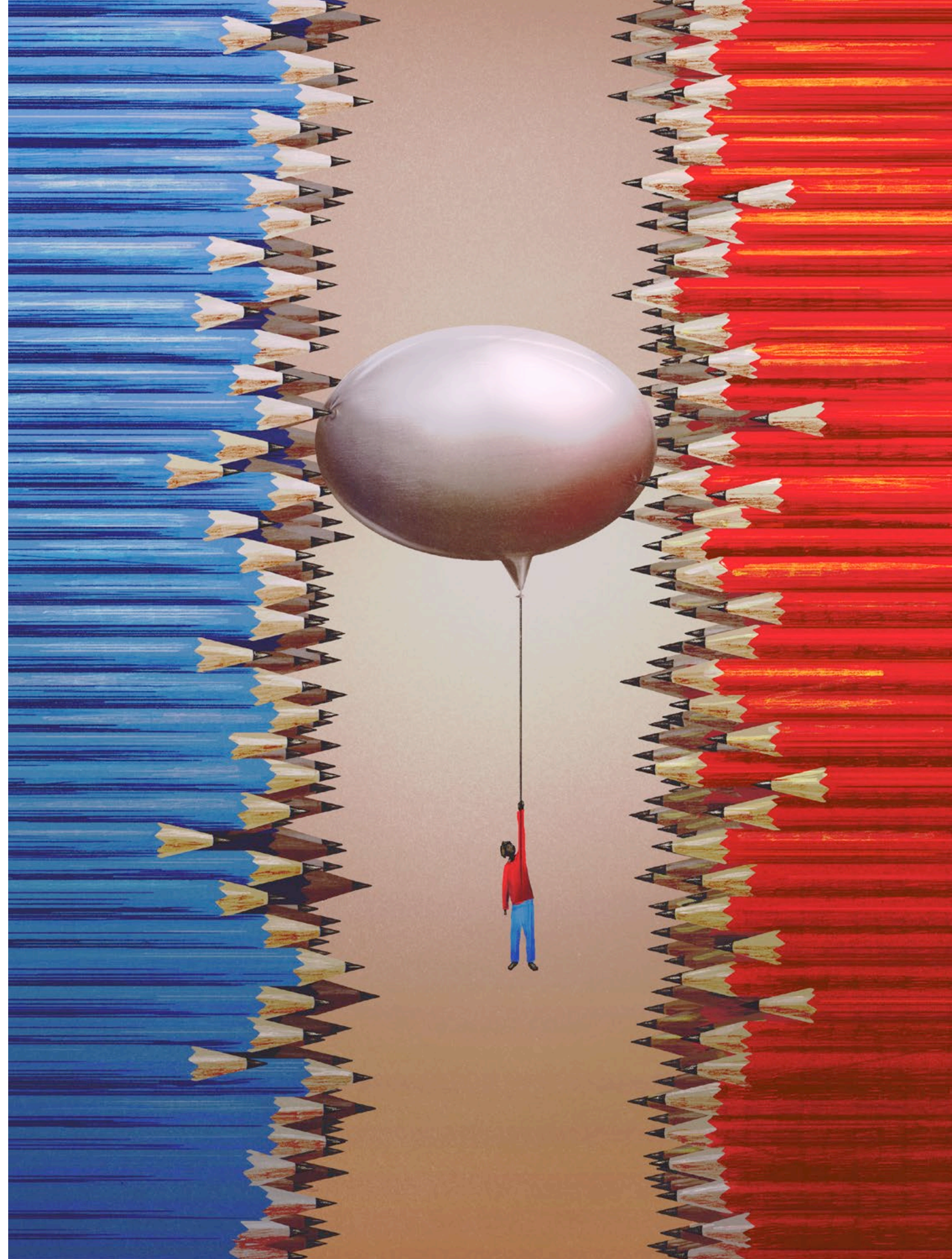
All of this served to compound the already difficult challenge of teaching kids.

“Educating for a Diverse Democracy” builds from a basic premise: People from different backgrounds and beliefs need to work together, and that starts at an early age, often in school. This dovetails with a central purpose of public education, which is “to strengthen our democracy by preparing students for informed civil engagement with civic and political life.”

This has been hampered, the report finds, by a divisive political atmosphere under former President Donald Trump, and by disagreements

“Critical thinking means exploring issues without fear, exploring issues that sometimes are difficult to explore.”

— Austin Beutner, former superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District



about pandemic restrictions, such as mask and vaccine mandates. These differences are exacerbated, the report notes, by the efforts of small but well-organized conservative groups adept at weaponizing topics such as Critical Race Theory — even if that is something rarely addressed in high school.

The findings are based on a survey of 682 public high school principals across the country, with nearly three dozen follow-up interviews. The researchers divided respondents into three segments: Blue territories for congressional districts where less than 45% of voters supported Trump in 2020; Red for where the Trump vote was 55% or greater; and Purple for everywhere else.

The results reveal growing division. The report found that 45% of principals saw “more” or “much more” conflict during the 2021-2022 school year than before the pandemic. The geographic divide came into play when principals were asked about derogatory remarks students made to liberal or conservative classmates: 19% of school leaders in Blue territories and 20% in Red areas said this happened multiple times. The figure was 32% in Purple communities.

Then there is race. The report found that 48% of all principals said parents or community members attempted to limit teaching about issues of race and racism — but this figure was 63% in Purple communities.

Another disturbing finding: 22% of principals in both Red and Blue communities reported multiple occasions in which students made hostile or demeaning remarks about LGBTQ+ classmates. In Purple districts, it was 32%.

The divisions in schools are real, and their impact goes even further, said Dr. Manuel Ponce, a clinical associate professor and director of Loyola Marymount University’s Institute of School Leadership and Administration. Ponce, who is helping develop the next generation of school administrators, said the discord worries his candidates.

“They are seeing the rhetoric ... and the disintegration of public discourse,” said Ponce, who formerly worked as a principal and regional superintendent with the Los Angeles area charter school group PUC Schools. “Our leaders come to us concerned about how they will navigate the world we are living in.”

“They are seeing the rhetoric... and the disintegration of public discourse.”
— Dr. Manuel Ponce, clinical associate professor and director of Loyola Marymount University's Institute of School Leadership and Administration

Another troubling element detailed in “Educating for a Diverse Democracy” is the spread of misinformation. Right-leaning groups not only reject the reporting of mainstream media but actively campaign against it. The report said 64% of all principals had parents or community members challenge the information or media sources used by teachers. Again, there was a geographic disparity: In 2022, 22% of Blue area and 16% of Red area principals reported parent or community challenges three or more times. The rate was 35% in Purple districts.

One principal quoted in the report described how parents “regularly send him articles” from sources such as the websites of conspiracist Alex Jones or Fox News host Tucker Carlson. The principal told the researchers, “[The parents] think they’re right ... and everyone else is wrong.”

An important aspect of “Educating for a Diverse Democracy” is that it builds on past work. Rogers, who has long researched ways to promote an egalitarian system in public schools, conducted a study in 2018 — two years into Trump’s term — on what principals were experiencing. At the time, he found a changing political climate, with school leaders reporting that some students were emboldened and operating with less sensitivity than before.

Then came COVID shutdowns and restrictions, and a nation further divided by the November 2020 elections. Political machinations intensified. In the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021, Rogers noted, conservative activists increasingly focused attention on public schools. This took multiple forms: protests over what was taught; vocal and vitriolic complaints at formerly sleepy school board meetings; even right-wing candidates seeking school board seats.

Rogers’ 2018 report became a baseline. He and Kahne were able to chronicle how cracks seen before the pandemic widened into chasms. Consider the statistic of 32% of principals in 2022 reporting multiple hostile or demeaning remarks about LGBTQ+ students: In 2018, the figure had been 10%.

So too with the 35% of principals who in 2022 reported three or more challenges of the media sources used by teachers: Four years before, the rate was 12%.

This shows that public schools can both reflect nationwide tensions — and become battlegrounds.

“The shift that I’ve seen play out from 2018 to 2022,” Rogers said, “is an environment in which the broad political rhetoric seeping into public schools has given way to political campaigns that are purposely targeting public schools and using culturally divisive issues as the centerpiece of those attacks.”

The harm comes not only from what is said aloud but also from what is not said later. “Educating for a Diverse Democracy” reveals that conflicts — even from a small minority of parents or of the community — can have a “chilling effect.” Some teachers and principals become unwilling to revisit certain topics for fear of stoking tensions.

“There are lots of angry parents or community members who come to school board meetings or who post on websites,” Rogers said, “and that creates a climate in which educators up and down the system are wary of leaning into lessons about race, or leaning into efforts to protect and celebrate queer students.”

“The chilling effect in part comes out of this sense of confusion about what are we now allowed to do, and what are we now prohibited from doing? It also comes out of this climate of fear in which there is threatening rhetoric and sometimes physical threats that are playing

PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/JEFF CHIU



out in the public realm [and] that lead educators to worry about their jobs, or lead them to worry about what is going to happen to their person.”

Rogers and Kahne posit that there are ways to combat this trend. Their report makes repeated references to a loud minority of parents and activists, leaving a silent majority who, if activated, could unify and be a force.

Additionally, there are opportunities to give more support and professional development to teachers. Further, their report finds that principals who themselves are civically engaged tend to lead schools that seek to educate for a “diverse democracy.”

There are other options, as well, although they can require leaders to gird for battle. When asked what suggestions he would have for principals and superintendents, Beutner, the former L.A. Unified superintendent, said: “Their true north is what’s right for the kid and what works in the classroom. If they need to stand in

front of the crazies, or between the crazies, sometimes it comes with the job. That’s what I would be doing. I think that’s what many of them are trying to do.”

Ponce, the director of LMU’s Institute of School Leadership and Administration, suggested that schools and districts recommit to their core mission and vision. Knowing precisely what one stands for, he said, can be a roadmap in the face of intolerance.

“Can you draw a line from what you say in your mission and vision to something connected to the community, connected to the needs of the students and parents, connected to clear equity, and ensure that you are looking at finding ways to fill equity gaps?” he asked. “There has to first be a clear understanding of what that anchor is going to be. Then that becomes non-negotiable in schools.”

Rogers stressed the importance of schools engaging with their entire constituencies — teachers, district leaders, community members, even students. Civic engagement requires active and open participation.

“For too long we’ve seen educators use a set of practices ... where they were basically telling students and parents what to do,” he said. “There need to be modes of outreach and engagement where educators are really inviting parents and students to work with them.”

His message: To combat hatred and intolerance, it takes not a village but the entire educational community. ▀

ROOFTOP SCHOOL SEVENTH-GRADER NIELS BURNS, LEFT, AND HIS BROTHER, FOURTH-GRADER HERON, WORK ON THEIR COMPUTERS AS STUDENTS AND PARENTS ATTEND DISTANCE LEARNING ZOOM CLASSES AT MIDTOWN TERRACE PLAYGROUND IN SAN FRANCISCO.

CALIFORNIA: LIBERAL LEADER OR LEFTIST HAVEN? GOVERNOR GAVIN NEWSOM TAKES STOCK OF HIS STATE



INTERVIEW WITH GOV. GAVIN NEWSOM, CONDUCTED AT HIS OFFICE
ON MARCH 29, 2023.



GAVIN NEWSOM IS A FIXTURE of California. Born in San Francisco, he got his start in the wine business before finding his way into politics. He served as mayor of his hometown in the early 2000s and sealed his place in its history when he recognized gay marriage in 2004, long before it was protected by state or federal law. Instantly transformed into a national political figure, Newsom embarked on an upward political march, and he today serves as California’s 40th governor.

Rare is the California governor who does not dream of the White House, and Newsom shows every sign of warming to the idea. Having weathered a recall at home, he easily won re-election, and he has delighted in tweaking rival governors, notably of Texas and Florida, as they eye one another for a possible contest.

That would present a personal competition, of course — pitting Ron DeSantis’ humorless snarl against Newsom’s wavy hair and distracting polish — but also one of competing values. Texas and Florida vie for standard-bearer of conservative America, while California stands as the undisputed leader of the left — a nation within the larger American nation. Newsom is all too happy to act as champion of that cause, one that allows him to promote his own brand and his state’s at the same time.

Newsom recently met with Blueprint editor-in-chief Jim Newton in the governor’s office overlooking the state Capitol. Newsom, dressed in jeans and a sweater over an untucked shirt, was both casual and painstaking; forceful in his defense of California; strategic in his challenge to rival governors; and unapologetic in his use of the powers at his disposal.

BLUEPRINT: How should California be perceived? I know that for you and many others, California is the noble leader of a set of values that the country ought to emulate, but there are also those who see it as a kind of woke hellscape that the country ought to avoid. How do you respond to them?

GAVIN NEWSOM: Well, you are nothing but a mirror of your consistent thoughts. Whatever you focus on, you find more of. Fox focuses on everything that’s wrong, and it finds plenty — with the Wall Street Journal parroting it, and the entire anger machine, from the surround-sound that you get with the New York Post and all things Murdoch Inc. ... For their ideological promotion to succeed, we have to fail. It’s profoundly important that we fail in their eyes. They have taken that to the next level in terms of their promotion of our weaknesses. ...

It’s a difficult dynamic for us, but this is a point of pride for me. I’m a future ex-governor in a couple of years. I’ve got no more elections here. But I deeply care. My soul, my core is with this state. I’ve been very animated by this question. I’ve been out there, trying to proactively defend this state, going into other states to make the point about how special this place is and how resilient we are.

BP: OK, so let me ask about some of the specifics that contribute to this tension. For starters, why do so many people leave California?

GN: There were 18 states that saw a reduction in population [in 2022]. So that’s No. 1. You saw a 3X population reduction in places like New York, which lost .9% of population versus .3% here. We were the 10th on that list of those 18 states. You saw more Floridians, per capita, coming to California than Californians going to Florida.

We also know that people are fleeing to higher tax states. It’s not for tax purposes.

BP: Right. A lot of people go to Oregon, which doesn’t seem like an ideological statement.

GN: And a lot of people go to Texas. Texas slams you. Texas tax rates are substantially higher than California’s. The vast majority of these states tax you substantially. So it’s not taxes. You think it is because Fox tells you that. And then you realize, “Wait a second, I’m not Elon Musk.” For Elon Musk, it’s cheaper because he’s that 1%. It’s one of the most regressive — Florida and Texas, I think, are two and three, the most regressive tax states in the country. [*Note: Washington state has America’s most regressive tax system, followed by Texas and then Florida.*] So it’s not about working folks.

But the cost of living is, I think, the principal driver. And housing supply and balance has been our original sin. That goes very directly to the issue of affordability and homelessness. ...

Trump’s immigration policies also played an outsized role. We have always been able to get first-round draft choices from around the rest of the world. And we have seen not just lower birth rates than we have seen in the past, but we have also seen our immigration numbers decline. That’s also had an impact. So a combination of those factors, and a relentlessness, truly a relentlessness, on the other side of demeaning and trying to diminish this state.

It’s very difficult if you’re, well, if you’re my father-in-law, to have any good feelings about this state, except in nostalgic terms — “I remember when ...” — when you’re constantly being fed everything that’s wrong. It manifests in a very damaging way.

BP: I am old enough to remember the theory that you could either have environmental protection or job growth but not both — that you had to choose. I assume California’s record suggests otherwise?

GN: It’s not even interesting anymore. California had 7.8% GDP growth in 2021. Prior to the pandemic, over a five-year period, according to Bloomberg — this is not me, this is Bloomberg — we were the fastest-growing jurisdiction of all Western democracies. How can that possibly be? According to Fox, it can’t be. Everyone’s left. The place is cracked up.

We outperformed every other jurisdiction, except for China. And Bloomberg just did another analysis that we are poised to become the fourth-largest economy in the world, overtaking Germany. So we’re moving up the ranks.

We outperformed the nation during COVID, during the contraction. We contracted less than Florida and Texas and less than the national average. We outperformed in terms of rebound and growth — outperformed the nation, Florida and Texas in 2021. And we outperformed them again in 2022.

We’re the tentpole in American job recovery in terms of job growth and creation. I think it was 32,300 jobs in February, and we recorded our lowest unemployment in recorded history — not in 50 years — in January.

This is a remarkably resilient state. It’s a remarkably abundant state. And it compares extraordinarily favorably to those peer states.

But the issue — and I keep coming back to it — that defines more issues than any other issue of affordability is housing. And that’s why we’ve been so animated in this. I’ve signed 20 CEQA reform bills. [CEQA is the California Environmental Quality Act, which establishes rules for reviewing and approving construction projects.] We still have more work to do. Last year, we had landmark housing legislation — I mean, breakthrough — working with building and construction trades, not just the environmental community.

So we’ve proved the paradigm. We have six times more “green collar” jobs than fossil fuel jobs. One of our top exports is electric vehicles. We have 55 headquartered manufacturing [electric vehicle companies]. Elon Musk had to come back to the state of California. By the way, he took no jobs with him when he announced he was leaving. In fact, he grew, by his own estimate, by 40% their headcount in California. ... And then he did his

[Tesla] world headquarters and R & D [research and development] here, because there’s just no other place.

BP: And I must say, it’s just exasperating to think that we have to judge the quality of our lives based on where Elon Musk decides to put his headquarters.

GN: I can assure you, it’s the last thing he wanted to do, but he needed to do it. And it only reinforces our leadership.

It is the regulations that created Tesla. It was the regulatory environment that created the policy acceleration to this low-carbon, green growth transition. And you can thank [then-Gov.] Ronald Reagan in 1967 for giving us that authority, and the Air Resources Board, and, of course, [President Richard] Nixon with the codification of that in the Clean Air Act. ...

That’s the authority that allows us to dominate economically ... and prove the paradigm that it’s not the tyranny of “or.” It’s the genius of “and.”

BP: You’ve anticipated this question, but let me ask it anyway: Is it your responsibility as governor to make housing more affordable in this state?

GN: Well, the question implies: What is the role of government? I’m not the mayor of California, as I have to keep reminding myself. ... In some ways, I wish I were, so I could drive some of the accountability that I’m looking for.

“I’M A FUTURE EX-GOVERNOR IN A COUPLE OF YEARS. I’VE GOT NO MORE ELECTIONS HERE. BUT I DEEPLY CARE. MY SOUL, MY CORE IS WITH THIS STATE.”



GOV. GAVIN NEWSOM, WITH HIS WIFE AND THEIR CHILDREN, MARCHES TO HIS INAUGURATION CEREMONY IN SACRAMENTO.

PHOTO BY GARY CORONADO/LOS ANGELES TIMES

You think about leadership in this area, and in some ways it’s climate control. It’s to create the conditions, establish the framework, the rules of engagement, so to speak, a framework of support and accountability at the same time. That’s the approach we’re taking on the housing. I think that is the job of the state — to remove as many barriers as possible, [and] still maintaining localism as a foundational principle, that it’s bottom-up, not top-down. One size does not fit all. ...

We have a \$15.3 billion homeless budget, from \$500 million to \$15.3 billion, and we’ve put unprecedented money into housing acceleration — infill grants — to support communities large and small. And we’re driving accountability to the next level. It’s a carrot-and-stick approach. I think all of that is our responsibility.

And changing some of the zoning and the absurd labyrinth of rules and regulations that get in the way, that slow down progress. The biggest threat to green energy and the environment is CEQA, the rules we’ve established. I’m not anti-CEQA, but it’s abused. When you’re using CEQA to stop a bike plan from going forward, that’s abuse.

BP: It’s certainly not what it set out to do.

GN: Look, we can’t build the housing. There’s some lazy naivete that says, “You only put up \$1.75 billion in your infill grants this year.” We’re not building the housing. It’s creating conditions where private investment can come in and at scale.

BP: Earl Warren used to say that he considered it his responsibility to provide homes for 10,000 new arrivals every week in California during the state’s rapid growth in the 1940s and early 1950s. People hear that and misunderstand it to mean that the state needed to build 10,000 units every week. But you’re not in the housing construction business.

GN: No. We jump-start. We create a framework and flexibility. And localism is determinative. But you have to have the ambition, and you have to have the policies to accelerate that ambition.

We have more work to do on CEQA reforms, more work to do in terms of creating more certainty in the process so we can invite more capital investment, and at the same time find that balance on being creative around density bonuses and in addressing the legitimate anxiety concerns [about] what’s happening in the wild land-urban interface and the proliferation of housing. ... That’s impacting some of our issues around forest fires, insurance ... and issues around what’s appropriate in a world that’s hotter and drier. ...

BP: As you look at L.A. specifically and the homeless situation there, I have to assume

that you don’t define success as every single person being housed. But how do you define the goal there? What does Mayor Karen Bass have to deliver for you to feel that she has succeeded?

GN: Success is not a place or a definition. It’s a direction. ... We will be measured by what we do or don’t do with what’s going on in the streets, the encampments. “It’s the encampments, stupid.” We have to deal with the encampment issue, which is overwhelmingly a drug issue now with fentanyl, with the new strains we’re seeing of meth. And it’s exacerbated by the behavioral health issues.

It gets to the zeitgeist of this state feeling unsafe.

When I got here, there was no homeless strategy. There was certainly no encampment strategy. There were no requirements for accountability. There was no money. Jerry [Brown] was compelled [by the mayors of the 13 largest cities] to provide roughly a half-a-billion-dollar contribution to the effort. ... But that was it. That was the first application of state accountability in this space, a willingness to partner with cities and counties.

[Newsom describes what he calls a successful, \$50 million pilot project to target encampments and require accountability to ensure that homeless people were not just being swept out of encampments to other areas.] We backed that up with literally a \$1.1 billion — it’s bigger than that now — campaign called Clean California to partner with the cities and counties to take back the spaces.

So: encampments. You have to see it. ... If we don’t demonstrably see reduction, not only will we have failed in the minds of the public, but we won’t have the political capacity to continue to make these kinds of investments. And shame on all of us. We own this.

BP: Immigration. You mentioned it already. Obviously, you can contrast California’s position with those states that are corralling immigrants and sending them to the vice president’s house or to Martha’s Vineyard. The stunt politics of that are not happening here.

GN: We’re not kidnapping migrants, for instance.

BP: Exactly. But is there a risk of being too welcoming, of being protective, in the sense that you may encourage people to come to this country illegally who shouldn’t, who ought to wait in line, ought to obey the law?

GN: You play with the cards you’re dealt. It’s a lived reality, not an academic one.

If people want to get rid of sanctuary policy, there’s a pretty simple pathway to do that: Create

a pathway to citizenship. Focus on comprehensive reforms. And that’s the federal government’s responsibility. But in the absence of federal leadership, you deal with the cards that are dealt — at the local level and at the state level.

It’s what Jerry [Brown, Newsom’s predecessor] did. It’s what I did as mayor. It’s what previous mayors did. It’s the work we did to keep people healthier, safer, and more educated. And by the way, I say “healthier, safer, and more educated” because I’m parroting Rudy Giuliani.

BP: Don’t let that become a habit.

GN: Let’s go with the gold standard. Rudy Giuliani himself, when he was mayor of New York, said his sanctuary policies kept people healthier, kept people safer, and kept people more educated. That school crossing guard wasn’t coordinating with ICE when that kid was getting into school. The doctor who was giving that flu shot wasn’t coordinating with ICE to keep people healthier and to address communicable diseases. When folks were seeing crimes, they were more likely to report them when they weren’t worried about law enforcement turning them over.

BP: That’s the basis of Special Order 40 [an LAPD order, issued by Chief Daryl Gates, that prohibits Los Angeles police officers from making stops solely on the basis of suspicions about immigration status].

GN: The data is out there on all that. I get why people are upset about this, and they have a right to be. But they shouldn’t be upset with state and local governments and elected officials who are trying to keep people healthier, safer, and more educated. They should focus their ire where it belongs, and that’s [with] the federal government, the inability for them to get out of their own way. They’re as dumb as they want to be.

I believe in the border. I just was down at the border. ... I was with the Border Patrol, and we have 144 National Guards, men and women. We’re adding 16 more to do the X-ray machines, to address the fentanyl crisis, to supplement some of the staffing needs that border protection has. I’m not an ideologue on this stuff. I believe in an orderly border process. I believe in comprehensive immigration reform.

But ... I’m sitting there, watching these kids with no shoelaces dumped in the middle of the streets and on sidewalks, and folks driving around in circles, ready to traffic these kids. That’s the reality. And that’s the federal role. So you throw people on a Greyhound at 1 in the morning, or you can invest in a thoughtful process. ...

Meanwhile, the No. 1 complaint you hear from Big Ag [Agriculture] everywhere is that they don’t have enough people.

I get the critique. I share it. But you’re pointing the finger in the wrong direction.

BP: I remember when Proposition 187 was being debated years ago, the idea that people somehow believed it would be good for society generally to deny vaccinations to people who were in the country illegally was just baffling. Forget the cold meanness of that. How about the self-interest?

GN: Look, immigration is part of our formula for success. We’ve had a formula since the ‘50s and ‘60s. ... We didn’t get here by accident, didn’t become the fourth largest economy in the world by accident. Foundationally, it was built around being able to get the best and the brightest from around the globe. Our innovation, our entrepreneurialism is defined by immigrants, valley to valley, Silicon Valley to Central Valley. No state has more to lose or more to gain on this issue.

BP: Guns. We have a lot of strict gun policies in this state, and yet we still have a lot of shootings. Has this state found the right way to regulate guns?

GN: The data is in. This is not a subjective point, it’s an objective one. Gun safety saves lives. The data is overwhelming. California’s leadership in this space is demonstrable. We’ve never suggested, never suggested that this state — a population the size of 21 states combined — will not have, in terms of numerics, tragedies such as we experienced, back to back, a few months ago. No one is suggesting that.

But on a per capita basis, when you look at what we’ve done since the Stockton shooting [a

1989 shooting at the Cleveland Elementary School in Stockton that left five children dead and more than 30 wounded], which really initiated some of the nation’s leading gun safety laws, it’s overwhelming. It’s not even comparable.

Last I checked, we had a murder rate something like 67% ... of a state like Texas [Note: In 2022, California’s rate of gun deaths, which includes murder as well as accidental deaths, was 8.5 per 100,000 residents: Texas’ was 14.2 per 100,000. California’s gun death rate, then, is about 60% of the rate in Texas. The most violent American states, in terms of gun deaths, are Mississippi, Louisiana, Wyoming, and Missouri, all with relatively lax gun safety laws.]

We are the nation’s leader in this space. ... We’ve always proved the paradigm.

BP: California, as you’ve already alluded, has long taken the position that it can and should use its economic and budgetary power to advance its values, whether it’s the catalytic converter, or farm practices, or animal welfare, or climate change. ...

GN: We always forget. It started here. The catalytic converter.

BP: So now we see DeSantis crack down on Disney and use his economic power to punish Disney for opposing Florida’s rules on LGBT issues, at the same time that you’re using California’s power to crack down on Walgreens. [in March, Newsom refused to

renew a contract with Walgreens after it announced that it would not supply abortion drugs in some states.] Why is it objectionable for DeSantis to punish Disney but not objectionable for you to punish Walgreens? Is there a principled distinction?

GN: I’d one-up you.

BP: OK.

GN: What about when I modeled, verbatim, a right of private action for bounties on guns after the abortion bill out of Texas? I said at the time, and I’ll repeat it, that it was authorized by the Supreme Court, and if these are the rules of engagement, then we will not unilaterally disarm. In the context of that decision, I said that if they’re going to use their authority — pursuant to the complicity of the U.S. Supreme Court — to put women’s lives at risk, I will use it to save people’s lives here in the state of California.

I would extend that to the more contemporary issue of Walgreens. These guys are getting rewarded for bad behavior. ... I’ve been calling that out a little bit. Walgreens, you can’t have it both ways. You can’t express values and promote them and not act on them. They unilaterally withdrew, before there was even adjudication of the facts in those states. They said [they would] not be providing these life-saving drugs in some cases, drugs that are legal to prescribe in this country. ... I wanted to express ourselves.

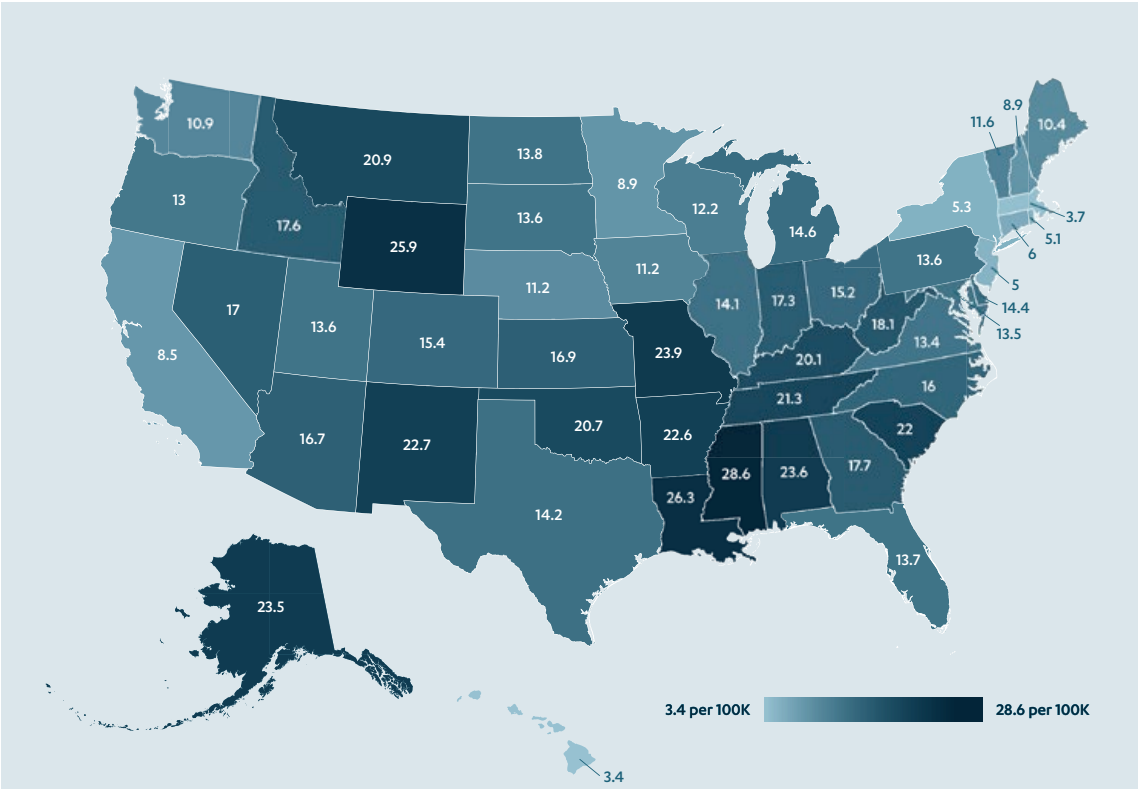
But the question is a fair question. I’ve been

Gun Deaths Per Capita by State

Regional trends of gun deaths in the United States per 100,000 residents

The gun death rate varies significantly across the United States. Mississippi has the highest rate of gun deaths per capita, with 28.6 deaths per 100,000 people, followed by Louisiana and Wyoming. On the other hand, Hawaii has the lowest gun death rate, with only 3.4 deaths per 100,000 people, followed by Massachusetts and New Jersey. The data reveals a clear regional trend in the distribution of gun deaths, with southern states generally experiencing higher rates of gun violence compared to northern states.

The high rate of gun deaths in southern states has been attributed to factors such as lax gun laws, high poverty rates, and cultural attitudes



“WE ARE THE NATION’S LEADER IN THIS SPACE. WE’VE ALWAYS PROVED THE PARADIGM.”
— Gov. Gavin Newsom

toward firearms. In contrast, northern states with stricter gun laws have lower rates of gun violence. For example, California, which has some of the most comprehensive gun control laws in the country, has a relatively low gun death rate of 8.5 per 100,000 people.

It is also worth noting that the issue of gun violence is complex, and factors such as mental health, domestic violence, and gang activity can contribute to the problem. Nonetheless, the data suggests that addressing the root causes of gun violence, such as

poverty and lack of access to mental health services, combined with sensible gun laws, could help reduce the number of deaths caused by firearms.

Source: [wisevoter.com/state-rankings/gun-deaths-per-capita-by-state/](https://www.wisevoter.com/state-rankings/gun-deaths-per-capita-by-state/)

very candid about it [using the state’s economic power]. ... I’ve struggled with, “Do I participate? Do I play into this? Do I stand on the sideline and continue to watch them run the tables?” I just think they’re winning.

BP: Well, that’s part of what drives this, right? It’s all well and good to take the high ground, but sometimes you get your ass kicked.

GN: That’s my point. They keep winning, and I’m terrified by it. ... We’re getting to the edge here, across the board, in terms of how far these folks are willing to go. DeSantis is kidnapping kids out of his own state. ... It’s so insane, and yet it’s so normalized now. What I’m trying to do is say, “Hey, hold on. ...”

California has a unique responsibility at this moment. They can kick me out if they don’t like my approach. ... It’s time to defend ourselves a little more muscularly. ...

BP: It does feel a little bit like bringing a knife to a gunfight.

GN: The right is ruthless. Their zest for demonization and othering is profound and pronounced. We’ve been at it for years, too. You brought up Proposition 187, and we’ve had xenophobia and the Briggs initiative [a 1978 California ballot measure that sought to prohibit gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools]. ...

BP: We’ve had our share.

GN: But that was like black-and-white-movie days. I thought we were done with this stuff. These guys, what they’re doing to the trans community. Fox [is going on] about how the trans community is full of homicidal murderers, and that’s the real lesson of Nashville [where a shooting at the Covenant School on March 27 killed three students and three staff members] and how the Catholic community is being oppressed, and no Christians are safe.

I mean, come on! I can’t take it.

So, expect more of that [pushback] from me. I’m not saying that with pride. I’m very conscious of the critique, and I accept it. I wear the critique. ►

CLOSING NOTE:

LEARNING FROM ANGER



THERE IS MUCH WE DON'T KNOW about hate, and much we still won't know when the projects described in this issue of *Blueprint* are completed. We may never know, sadly, why hate so persistently corrupts the human heart.

But we are learning about its consequences. Schools, for instance, are witnessing the effects of division. As Jon Regardie reports in this issue, conflict and misinformation that have infected the larger society have undermined schools as well. Attempts to restrict learning — mostly by cynical politicians who pretend that Critical Race Theory or similar learning theories have corrupted primary education when they know full well this is not true — have only deepened the potential for harm. COVID and shutdowns made bad problems worse. And those problems stretch across the nation.

Meanwhile, the long tentacles of hatred reach into areas of our lives that may not be obvious. We recognize hatred in politics, or in the tiki-torch-lit marches of White supremacists. But Brett McCully, an assistant professor of economics at Collegio Carlo Alberto in Italy, and Jun Luo, a third-year Ph.D. student in the UCLA Department of Communication, are asking questions about the relationship between hatred and extremist media. They hope to gain insight into which causes which. The results of

their research are still coming in, but the findings may soon help to illuminate whether certain media are merely reporting about hatred or whether their work is contributing to it.

Then there is what might be most troubling of all: the possibility that hatred not only affects the lives of young children, but that it also may lead some of those children to kill themselves. The dismaying potential for hatred to prove lethal in this way might be underestimated because of bias in studying the deaths of young people, particularly young people who are Black. Another enterprising pair of researchers, Jocelyn Meza, a licensed clinician who works with suicidal children, and Adrian Flores, who specializes in gender and women's studies, are pursuing those disturbing possibilities. They, too, will soon report back.

The work of these students and professors won't eliminate hatred, but it may begin to help us understand its ramifications and take steps to respond. If, for example, bias has blinded doctors and others to the pain being experienced by Black children, perhaps acknowledging that bias would help open medical eyes to that suffering and provide the care those children need.

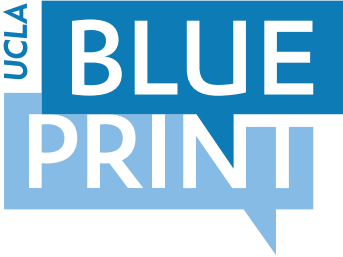
The same may prove true for politics. American politicians these days might be more likely to capitalize on hatred than to reject it. But there, too, examining hatred and its consequences could prove beneficial. If we are better able to identify hatred, we have the power to hold it against candidates and other political figures who use it.

Admittedly, that's not foolproof. History and polling suggest that there is political power in hatred. Demonization of those who are different — by race, religion, immigration status, sexual orientation — is a time-tested way of electrifying a chunk of the electorate. It even has a name: "othering." And it works: Surveys show that many Republicans and Democrats now see members of the other party not only as wrong on issues, but also as less moral than themselves.

There is reason to believe that some voters are tiring of the process, eager for more cooperation in Washington and ready for differences to recede rather than boil into blood feuds over which party or candidate holds the absolute truth and which is guilty of crimes.

Will the study of hatred lead to more comity, at least in public life? There is no way to know quite yet. We are left to hope.

— **Jim Newton**



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Elizabeth Kivowitz Boatright-Simon

OFFICE MANAGER
Lauren Munro

CONTRIBUTORS

MADDIE DINOWITZ is a senior at UCLA and a freelance writer for Los Angeles-based magazines.
maddiedino@ucla.edu

LISA FUNG is a Los Angeles-based writer and editor who has held senior editorial positions at the Los Angeles Times and The Wrap.
lisa.fung5@gmail.com

JON REGARDIE spent 15 years as editor of the Los Angeles Downtown News. He is now a freelance writer contributing to Los Angeles Magazine and other publications.
jregardie@gmail.com

MOLLY SELVIN is a legal historian and former staff writer for the Los Angeles Times. She is now a freelance writer based in Los Angeles.
molly.selvin@gmail.com

KAT SCHUSTER is a journalist based in Long Beach who covers California politics, public health and breaking news for Patch. She's covered communities throughout the central coast and Southland for dozens of newspapers since 2014.
katannschuster@gmail.com

FEATURED RESEARCHERS

KUSHAN DASGUPTA
kushan@g.ucla.edu

JUN LUO
junluo0829@g.ucla.edu

JOCELYN MEZA
jimeza@mednet.ucla.edu

BRETT MCCULLY
brett.mccully@carloalberto.org

AARON PANOFISKY
apanofsky@ucla.edu

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SOMETHING TO SAY?

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