Are Democrats in Danger of Losing Latino Men?

Why they shifted toward Trump in 2020 — and what liberals can do to win them back

BY ERIC GARCIA

Why I became a citizen after 18 years in the U.S.

Documenting the ties formed in D.C. homeless communities
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The Fight for Latino Men
Why are Latino voters — especially men — drifting toward the GOP? 24

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The Anthropology of Homelessness

This D.C. researcher is studying the ties formed in temporary encampments

BY JUSTIN WM. MOYER

In homeless encampments just blocks from Capitol Hill, the routine pretty much never changes. Those living in tents pitched beneath two railroad underpasses north of Union Station not only battle poverty, the pandemic and the weather; they also endure the din of every kind of train running through the District — Amtrak, CSX and Metro among them.

One recent day amid the tumult, American University researcher Aaron Howe was distributing hygiene kits, thermal underwear, flashlights, hand warmers — anything to help anyone who would accept help. Howe, a PhD candidate in anthropology with an interest in anarchism and a background in archaeology, has studied the NoMa encampments for years, becoming a frequent source for journalists covering them as they increasingly drew the ire of the surrounding business district. In opinion pieces and in an often confrontational Twitter account (@Anarchopology) — featuring messages about Howe’s own financial and mental health struggles as well as criticism of American University policies — the researcher-activist advances unconventional observations about the nature of homelessness.

“One of the narratives I’m trying to change is that homeless are a homogenous, singular group that are only victims and they only need charity and help,” Howe had told me in February 2020, sitting on a plush couch in the lobby of a Marriott downtown after deciding not to order anything at an adjacent Starbucks. “I’m trying to show they actually have agency and are using rational thought.” A year later, their fundamental view has not changed.

Howe, 30, comes to housing insecurity — arguably the most serious problem plaguing gentrified cities like Washington — from an unusual starting point: 19th-century logging villages established by mostly Finnish immigrants in Michigan. While a student in Grand Rapids, the Michigan native worked on archaeological digs studying the temporary communities, which moved up and down Lake Michigan as loggers “followed the timber.” “I look at that alternative community formation and definition of what is home and bring that to my work now,” they say.

Howe started their D.C. fieldwork in 2017 not long before decades-old encampments beneath the
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Whitehurst Freeway in Northwest Washington near the Kennedy Center were dismantled by city officials — a policy decision that, Howe would find, simply displaced the people living there to the underpasses north of Massachusetts Avenue NE. Howe decided to study the local encampments while working with an adviser who studied “hobo archaeology” among migrant workers in the 20th century, including a “hobo jungle” site near the border of Pennsylvania and Maryland.

That adviser, American University professor Dan Sayers, says ethnographies of such communities “took hold a bit in the 1970s” among anthropologists. Like any artifact — a tool, a house or the tomb of the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamen — the tents of encampment residents speak volumes about how they live and why they live the way they do. Among anthropologists, this is “material culture” — from soda bottle caps to propane heaters — and studying it can help researchers understand how to help those living on the margins.

Rachael Kiddey — an Oxford University archaeologist and author of “Homeless Heritage: Collaborative Social Archaeology as Therapeutic Practice,” based on fieldwork among homeless people in Britain — says this kind of research is necessary for the world to think of homelessness not only as a problem, but as a culture. “There’s a place for archaeology — for a cultural heritage narrative — in helping people come to terms with loss and trauma,” she says. “You tell it as a story and get it out.”

Eric Sheptock, 52, is a longtime advocate for homeless people who is himself homeless; he has lived for 12 years at a D.C. shelter, one of about a dozen operated by the city. He is not sure if he would call homelessness a “culture,” but recognizes a “camaraderie.” Encampment residents police conflicts themselves to keep authorities away, while shelter residents may do something as trivial as agreeing on a TV schedule to avoid conflict in an environment that often fosters it.

Some people end up living in encampments because they think shelters are unsafe, or they avoid shelters because they don’t want structure. “There is a culture within the homeless community for people to be responsible, to help each other,” Sheptock told me. “They’re already unwanted.”

Howe has found that encampments are less chaotic than they are often perceived to be. Residents sometimes work together for mutual aid, whether that means sharing income from day jobs to buy drugs or keeping violent men out of areas reserved for women — practices Howe calls a “moral economy” like those found among Maori tribes in New Zealand, and potlatch, or gift-giving, ceremonies among North America’s Iroquois.

In January 2019, the city started increasing the frequency of cleanups — or “engagements,” as they are called by the D.C. Department of Human Services — and Howe helped people at First and K streets NE keep their belongings out of a trash truck. Howe also was thrust into a quasi-journalistic activist role, calling the department to account on social media when it allegedly did not give residents sufficient time to move. (The mayor’s office did

Howe and Shannon Coark in Washington.
Photograph by Shuran Huang
“There is a culture within the homeless community for people to be responsible, to help each other,” says Eric Sheptock, a longtime advocate for homeless people who is himself homeless. “They’re already unwanted.”

not respond to a request for comment.)

The field wasn’t necessarily an easy space to navigate emotionally. Howe wasn’t pretending to be a disinterested social scientist, but they weren’t a social worker either. As they made clear on social media, they were a relatively privileged PhD candidate — but not privileged enough to live in a pricey NoMa apartment next to the encampment they were studying. “At the end of the day, I don’t make enough money to be able to write a dissertation, do good research and survive,” Howe told me. “It’s awkward complaining sometimes because I got to go home. I got to walk away from it. I got to go under the covers. Sometimes I would feel guilty.”

Dissertations have to be written after being researched, and Howe, an asthmatic who fears covid, spent the early days of the pandemic huddled in a Brookland apartment struggling with a crashing laptop. After the summer’s Black Lives Matter protests made it clear that street activism need not trigger superspreader events, Howe emerged again to find the inequities that existed before the pandemic.

On weekly runs with a partner to provision those living beneath the underpasses at L and M streets, Howe learned that many regulars from before the pandemic had disappeared — some to new encampments that Howe says are “popping up all around the city.” Even before the end of D.C.’s eviction moratorium on March 31, the coronavirus was taking its toll on unhoused people. Some avoided shelters because of fears of the disease, while others, who had doubled up in temporary living situations, were driven out by the stresses associated with everyone, suddenly, staying home.

The pandemic has pushed those already living on the margins closer to the edge. But focusing on violence or exploitation in encampments rather than on the mutual aid practiced there denies homeless people agency, Howe says. “I don’t think people should live under underpasses,” they explain. “Something I see is how awesome their ability to survive is.”

Justin Wm. Moyer is a reporter for The Washington Post.
“As police, if we could see policing through the eyes of those being policed, I think it would go a long way toward building trust and legitimacy.”

Charles Ramsey

INTERVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPH BY KK OTTESEN

Charles Ramsey, 71, began his career in law enforcement more than 50 years ago as a police cadet on Chicago’s South Side. He went on to lead police departments in D.C. and Philadelphia, and was co-chair of President Barack Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

The profession of policing has been under fire for some time. How much of that is warranted, in your opinion, and what do you make of calls to defund the police?

Well, some of it is warranted. You can’t look at a George Floyd video or some of these other videos and think that it’s not warranted. The problem is that it paints the profession with a very broad brush. I mean, right now, people are talking about Eugene Goodman at the Capitol and how heroic he is. And he is. But if that had not happened, he’d just be another cop that people would walk by or make an assumption that he was very much like the guy who was kneeling on George Floyd’s neck and murdered him because of the uniform he’s wearing. And that’s a shame.

How do you understand the situation along the spectrum of a few bad apples versus systemic issues?

Well, there are systemic issues, in my opinion. I don’t know if they’re as severe as some people think, but any systemic problem is something that has to be dealt with. We keep using “just a few bad apples.” But, I mean, at some point in time, you have to take a look at the tree. You know, maybe you need an arborist to come examine it. We have to not be afraid to say that we have issues. So are you part of the problem, or are you a protector? As police, if we could see policing through the eyes of those being policed, I think it would go a long way toward building trust and legitimacy.

What is your sense of the degree to which members of anti-government and white supremacist groups are part of law enforcement today?

Well, I think they’re in every part of society — to what extent, I have no idea. I don’t think anybody really does. There is no profession that’s immune from having people with extreme views. And that’s the danger of it. People look normal unless they open their mouths and say something.

I would think that in law enforcement the standard should be higher even than in most jobs in society.

Oh, yeah. I’m not trying to minimize it. There should be a higher standard for police. There’s no question in my mind. We’re not ordinary folks. We have an awesome responsibility that’s been given us by the people that we serve. And they have a right to demand higher standards. I think police departments need to start paying closer attention to people’s social media, those kinds of things, to get indications as to whether or not people have these extreme views. You can’t have cops that have these kinds of extreme views. You just can’t.

You have to be neutral as a police officer. I remember when I was in D.C. — I forget the exact year — we had a small group of Ku Klux Klan that wanted to march. Now, I had to throw out any personal feelings or attitudes or what have you. Because what mattered was the fact that they had a right to be able to demonstrate, even though I found personally disgusting everything they stand for.

How hard is that to do?

It’s difficult, but not as difficult as you’d think. Because you just realize what your responsibilities and duties are. And that’s what you focus on. You don’t focus on what the sign reads, you don’t read that crap. Your job isn’t to agree or disagree. It’s to protect their right to demonstrate. I mean, that’s a key role of police in a democratic society: to protect the constitutional rights of people.

That’s part of our oath, but it’s not the part that most cops even talk about. You ask them what their role is, they’ll say, “Enforce the laws.” If the first thing they said was, “To protect the rights of people,” would we be even having this conversation right now?

KK Ottesen is a regular contributor to the magazine. This interview has been edited and condensed. For a longer version, visit wapo.st/magazine.
Just Asking

"As police, if we could see policing through the eyes of those being policed, I think it would go a long way toward building trust and legitimacy."

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KK Ottesen is a regular contributor to the magazine. This interview has been edited and condensed. For a longer version, visit wapost.mayazine.
Before the pandemic, Lexi Vanderhye, 41, rarely felt lonely. But in the past few weeks, the isolation started getting to the D.C.-area native, who is weathering the health crisis in a relative’s Upstate New York apartment with her two dogs. So she applied to Date Lab. “I really missed human interaction,” she said. “I don’t think that I could start a really intimate relationship during covid, but I’m looking to make a connection with someone.”

Lexi had no idea what to expect, but she planned to have fun regardless. The date was scheduled for 7:30 on a Friday night, and she finished working at 5:30 — not a lot of time to walk her dogs, shower, get ready and eat. Although The Washington Post pays for dinner, Lexi chose to forgo the free meal. “I didn’t order anything because I hate watching myself eat on Zoom,” she said. “Even when it’s a little screen.” She heated up some vegan chicken with sweet potatoes and ate while she got ready — in the bathroom.

It sounds stressful, but “I wasn’t stressed — it was purposeful,” she said. “I felt really positive going into it.” To get in the right mind-set, she listened to her Spotify playlist, which included “I’m on Fire” by Bruce Springsteen. She wore a long-sleeved, blue lace dress and set up her laptop at the kitchen bar, where she normally works. She drank tea and wine during the date.

It’s possible that Jeffrey Davis, 39, went into the date with even fewer expectations. While he is interested in a long-term relationship, he hasn’t “tried too seriously” to find a partner during the pandemic. Like Lexi, he’s hunkered down in a home-away-from-home, a cabin in a small town in Virginia. In fact, he had forgotten about his Date Lab application — he applied about a year ago. He was prepared for awkward “moments of quietness,” he said. “I wasn’t sure that there’d be a good match.”

Jeffrey wanted to put his best foot forward, but his options were a bit limited. “I’ve been growing this scraggily beard,” he said, “and I didn’t have enough time to shave it.” He pulled out the nicest shirt he had packed, a basic collared shirt, and rearranged the furniture in his one-room hunting cabin, turning the table to face the window. Otherwise, his laptop would have been facing a taxidermied deer head, pictures of duck hunters and his kitchen. The only problem with the window, though, was the darkness of the night behind him. He was worried that “it looked like an interrogation room, with the harsh lights overhead.” He ordered takeout, a “tasty but unhealthy” stromboli from local sports-themed joint Cucci’s, and picked up an American-style pale ale. Once seated, he fiddled with the lighting again.

The moment arrived and they both logged on. The attraction was instant. “He was definitely handsome,” Lexi said. Jeffrey noticed her “nice smile” and added, “She’s very pretty.” Something about Jeffrey put Lexi at ease. “Immediately, I was not nervous,”

She immediately felt at ease with him

Lexi Vanderhye is 41 and works for a nonprofit. She is looking for someone who “is outdoorsy, kind, funny, authentic and nice to my dogs.”

Jeffrey Davis is 39 and an analyst. He is seeking someone with “dry humor, maybe sardonic.”

Sign up for Date Lab at washingtonpost.com/datelab.
she said, “because he was so nice and chill.” She added: “I thought immediately that he seemed really good-natured.”

“We hit it off right away,” Jeffrey said. They began with small talk about where they both are during the pandemic, and the conversation flowed from there. “I really think we talked about everything from our childhood to our ambitions,” he said. One thing Jeffrey noticed: They didn’t talk about work, which he found refreshing.

“I never was trying to think of something to say next,” Lexi noted. “Everything he was saying was interesting.” She was especially attracted to Jeffrey’s lifestyle: He seemed to enjoy the outdoors. She was also impressed by his experiences teaching kids in Tonga for the Peace Corps.

They talked about why they’re much happier now than they were in their 20s. “We were both just a lot more comfortable with ourselves and less worried about what other people thought,” Lexi said.

For Jeffrey, a positive attitude ranked high on his must-have list. “At our age, I’ve met people who seem embittered,” Jeffrey said. “I was concerned that I would be matched with someone who is jaded or cynical. She seems very optimistic.”

Lexi also enjoyed Jeffrey’s outlook on life. “He seems like a positive person who is really making the most out of his life, just like a really good person,” she said. “I was very pleased.”

Time flew by. In part because of the conversation, in part because he didn’t want to stuff his face with the stromboli, Jeffrey didn’t start eating until around 9 p.m. They talked for another two hours after that.

Before they said goodbye, Lexi asked for Jeffrey’s number. She texted him while they were still on the Zoom call. “We checked the time, and I knew I had to take my dogs out,” Lexi said. “I had such a great time.”

RATE THE DATE
Lexi: 5 [out of 5].
Jeffrey: 5.

UPDATE
Lexi and Jeffrey have stayed in touch and had two additional virtual dates.

Prachi Gupta is a writer in New York.
Are you considering how you’ll spend your retirement? Forty years ago, you may have dreamed of one day relocating to a beach in Thailand, but now that the time has actually come, you’re likely more inclined to stay near family, friends and the greater Washington region that you feel at home in. The most important considerations now are what your ideal lifestyle is and which amenities and services you want regular access to.

Finding the right community is a matter of understanding your options—and they are plentiful! Locales range from quaint mountain neighborhoods to waterside campuses to upscale communities just outside of downtown D.C. Making minor updates to transform your current house to your retirement home is never off the table, either.

Take the time to explore all of your options, as you never know what will strike your fancy. This assortment of the region’s retirement communities will show you the exciting possibilities that are available for the next significant chapter of your life.
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A Connected, Enriched Lifestyle Awaits at Shenandoah Valley Westminster-Canterbury

The stunning Shenandoah Valley has inspired songs and poetry, with spectacular scenery, lush vineyards and crystalline caverns. It also radiates with a rich, inspiring history and offers endless attractions, such as museums, legendary battlefields, vibrant downtown areas and outdoor recreation opportunities. It’s an idyllic place to spend your retirement years, and Shenandoah Valley Westminster-Canterbury (SVWC) is right in the heart of this beautiful setting, where natural beauty and national pride converge.

SVWC is a church-related, not-for-profit, continuing care, life plan retirement community that has been welcoming residents since 1987. The 87-acre campus in Winchester, Virginia, includes a 14-acre natural preserve with well-kept walking trails. A community garden and a greenhouse are available for those with a green thumb (and others who aspire to have one). The putting green and manicured croquet/bocce ball court are popular for a bit of friendly competition.

Residents also enjoy superior senior living amenities for a maintenance-free lifestyle, with fitness services, four dining venues, social excursion opportunities and more. The on-site courtyard and water feature add to the beauty of the location.

A variety of residence options are available, including apartments, cottages, single-family homes, and range from 709 to 2,550 square feet. Priority deposits are now being accepted for SVWC’s upcoming Villa project. This new concept will have large, open floor plans and blend the best features of traditional cottage and apartment living.

Nearly 400 happy individuals reside at SVWC, having moved in at the Independent level. If the need arises for a higher level of care, private assisted-living and skilled-nursing residences are available, with memory care and rehabilitation accessible too. Knowing that their loved ones will be well taken care of, families can relish true peace of mind.

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A greenhouse provides year-round opportunities for planting and nurturing.

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– Beverly B., a community resident

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- **Gain time and freedom** from the hassle and expense of house repairs.

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The Villas at Shenandoah Valley Westminster-Canterbury will be a new independent living neighborhood - using environmentally sensitive principles - overlooking scenic ponds, woodlands, and meadows for picturesque living and entertaining with immediate access to every amenity on our campus. With 97 one- and two-bedroom residences slated for completion in 2023, the future at SVWC is definitely worth investigating now.

For more information, VISIT SVWC.ORG/VILNAS

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Falcons Landing, an upscale, CARF-accredited retirement community in Potomac Falls, is just a short ride from Metro Washington, D.C. Designed for seniors with military and government backgrounds, Falcons Landing offers the chance to retire in style among peers who have the common bond of service to our country.

Residents cite the friendships forged as the primary benefit of Falcons Landing, along with being a nonprofit. Living in a life plan community, residents say, provides a certain comfort and peace of mind. Falcons Landing offers a full calendar of social events and activities—customized for safety and social distancing during COVID-19.

In fact, during the pandemic, Falcons Landing executive team and staff united to add home delivery of meals, groceries and more, all while providing creative outlets and connectivity during the quarantine at all levels of care. In addition to adding extra safety measures across campus, Falcons Landing was the first community to secure the National Guard for complete testing of staff and residents and one of the first communities in 2021 to secure the vaccine for staff and residents.

New Terrace Homes, opening in March and May of 2021, offer four new spacious, open-concept floor plans with abundant closet space, outdoor living and easy access to all the campus amenities! Residents have access to trails and parks, a doctor and nurse practitioner on staff and the security of knowing that when you pick up the phone, someone is always on the other line to help.

If you ask any resident at Falcons Landing, they will tell you the best thing you can do to jump-start your retirement is to reserve your spot. Contact the friendly team at Falcons Landing today and schedule your in-person or virtual visit! 703-783-2831, email at info@falconslanding.org or visit online at www.falconslanding.org.

Imagine the perfect retirement
Chart a course to a sunnier future at Buckingham’s Choice, a premier Acts Retirement-Life Community in Maryland. Here you’ll find gracious living options, superb on-campus amenities and the worry-free lifestyle you need to start making marvelous new memories with great new friends. Best of all, with Acts Life Care® you’ll enjoy knowing that a plan is in place and your nest egg is protected if your needs ever change. Call us today to find out how you can celebrate the good life at Buckingham’s Choice.

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Next Generation Senior Living at Modena Reserve at Kensington

A reimagined retirement awaits at Modena Reserve at Kensington. Blending sophistication and convenience, this senior living community in the highly desirable location of Kensington, Maryland, offers its residents a 5-star experience that spans independent living, assisted living and memory care.

The community is designed to inspire an elevated quality of life for its residents. Trained and caring staff are dedicated to excellence, taking the time to provide personalized service and oversee engaging life-enrichment programs. All residents have access to these programs, which include continuing education, guest lectures, live entertainment, art classes, wine tastings, political debates and more.

Best-in-class amenities encourage an active lifestyle and social interaction. Delight in gourmet cuisine at The Founders Club Restaurant, enjoy a night of live theater, unwind by the firepit with friends and stop by one of many onsite lounges for a coffee in the morning or wine in the evening.

Residents also enjoy unlimited use of a state-of-the-art fitness center, local transportation in a Tesla SUV and weekly housekeeping and laundry services.

“Our culture is next generation, and our goal each and every day is to deliver an unparalleled senior living experience, giving you the peace of mind and satisfaction you deserve in an environment with the highest caliber safety protocols, innovative technologies and high-quality services,” says Executive Director Janet Bradley. “We cannot wait to WOW you with our exquisite cuisine, sophisticated amenities and life enriching programs that will nourish your mind, body and spirit.”

For those who need extra care, the community’s Memory Care neighborhood offers residents the choice of a private studio apartment or a semi-private apartment. Rooms have visual cuing, are easy to navigate and feature soothing hues for a calming environment. Higher staffing ratios and team members trained in dementia care ensure a comfortable and secure experience for residents.

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Two of the nation’s leading senior living experts have collaborated to introduce boutique senior living communities rooted in hospitality and integrated wellness—with impeccable service, innovative care and pioneering programing that focuses on renewal, rather than retirement.

The Seneca in Rockville, Maryland, is a Silverstone/Watermark Retirement Communities property located in an idyllic setting on the edge of King Farm. This brand-new community offers assisted living, memory care and The Bridge—an option for those with mild cognitive impairment. Staff is highly trained to serve from their heart and care for the whole person, ensuring needs are met with patience, understanding and love.

The Seneca boasts a wide variety of amenities that rival world-class resorts, such as a concierge service, chef-driven restaurants, a lounge with full bar, a salon/day spa and a serenity garden with a labyrinth. Each floor is adorned with a gallery of unique wall art and sculpture that sparks curiosity and encourages exploration.

Studio, one- and two-bedroom residences are available on a monthly rental basis and feature modern kitchenettes, upscale finishes, tall ceilings and windows that allow for an abundance of natural light.

The Seneca offers innovative programming that incorporates cutting-edge technology like EngageVR, a virtual reality exercise that keeps the brain active with uplifting and educational experiences. EngageVR allows residents to tour museums and cities or visit the neighborhood they grew up in. Residents can participate in courses and workshops from Watermark University, a program that allows residents, associates and family members to teach and take classes on specific subjects they are passionate about.

With a focus on residents’ health, The Seneca features innovations that reduce or prevent transmission of viruses. These include an enhanced filtration and HVAC system, cold plasma bipolar ionization, relative humidity levels of 40-60% and touchless technology in common areas.

The Seneca is now leasing and will welcome residents in July. Discover how The Seneca is redefining assisted living by calling 240-614-2800 or visiting senecarockville.watermarkcommunities.com.

The Village at Providence Point—A National Lutheran Community

In retirement, you finally have time for yourself. Whether you take up painting or poetry, traveling or tai chi, home base should be more than a shelter—it should enrich your life. The Village at Providence Point is being designed to do just that.

Opening in 2024, world-class amenities await the residents of this brand-new continuing care retirement community (CCRC). Amenities will include extraordinary dining, an indoor aquatic center, fitness center, walking trails, lifelong learning opportunities, underground parking, housekeeping, all maintenance and much more!
The community will sit on beautiful wooded grounds just minutes from the heart of Annapolis, Maryland. The independent living apartments and cottages will offer open floor plans with high ceilings and top-of-the-line finishes.

“This new and exciting senior living community is poised to change the landscape of senior living in Annapolis,” says Sales Director Chill Hotchkiss. The community will soon begin to take reservations with their current priority depositors as they select their preferred home style and location.

The Village at Providence Point is sponsored by National Lutheran Communities & Services, a faith-based, not-for-profit ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, serving people of all beliefs. The Village at Providence Point is subject to the final approval of the Maryland Department of Aging.

For more information, call 410-609-5515 or visit www.thevillageatprovidencepoint.org.

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For retirement living defined by meaningful experiences, look no further than Asbury Methodist Village. This welcoming continuing care retirement community in Gaithersburg, Maryland, offers unmatched events and programs—including a resident-run college—with services that support aging better for longer.

Across the 134-acre campus, residents have access to cultural events, a cutting-edge brain health program, six restaurants, 120 resident-driven clubs and an indoor pool. Residents enjoy tennis, bocce, a community garden and strolling Asbury’s 17-acre wildlife preserve. Furry friends will enjoy stretching their legs at the PAWS Dog Park.

With 99% of independent-living residents vaccinated, Asbury is safely adding in-person events to many online programs run through its very own TV station.

In addition to beautiful independent-living options, Asbury offers a full continuum of health services, including on-site geriatric primary care.

Find out more about this premier retirement community by visiting AsburyMethodistVillage.org or calling 301-304-7754.

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WHY ARE LATINO VOTERS — ESPECIALLY MEN — DRIFTING TOWARD THE GOP? FOR ME, IT'S A QUESTION THAT HITS CLOSE TO HOME.
Trump, My Dad and the Fight for Latino Men

WHY ARE LATINO VOTERS — ESPECIALLY MEN — DRIFTING TOWARD THE GOP? FOR ME, IT'S A QUESTION THAT HITS CLOSE TO HOME.

STORY BY ERIC GARCIA / ILLUSTRATION BY MARLY GALLARDO
In 2016, my dad, Charlie Garcia — a third-generation Mexican American and lifelong Republican — supported Sen. Ted Cruz in the GOP presidential nomination contest. Recently, he recalled that, of the 17 candidates who ran for the Republican nomination in 2016, “Trump was my 17th.” Toward the end of the election, I remember him saying that he would “hold my nose and vote for Trump.”

But by this past November, something had changed. As far as I can tell, my dad voted while breathing through his nose as clearly as somebody could when wearing a face mask. Not only did he enthusiastically support Donald Trump, he gave money to the Republican National Committee. Though he has supported every GOP presidential candidate since 1980, he now contrasts them all unfavorably with Trump. “They can’t compare with what Trump has done,” he told me recently. “And some of the things that he came up with I said, ‘Oh man, why did you do that, Trump? That’s not going to go over well.’ And it turns out, my God, what a brilliant move! I had no idea. He’s just a master.”

A native of San Antonio, my dad spent much of his career working in sales; these days, he runs residential care facilities for the elderly in Orange County, Calif. His mother and father were born in the United States. My grandfather’s mother was likely born in France, but his father was Mexican while my grandmother’s parents were likely from Monterrey, Mexico. That mix of Mexican and American is why he calls me both “son” and its Spanish equivalent, “mijo.”

When I was growing up, we frequently watched Fox News (these days, like many conservatives, my dad prefers Newsmax); he regularly listens to conservative talk radio when he isn’t listening to classic-rock stations. He proudly displays a plaque that Ronald Reagan gave my grandfather for his service as a paratrooper in World War II. He has told me that The Washington Post, where I used to work, regularly makes things up about Trump. When he came to visit me in D.C. and we walked past CNN’s building, he half-jokingly said, “Fake news.”

My dad’s politics wouldn’t be of much interest to the wider world, except that he’s part of a group that constituted one of the most puzzling footnotes to the 2020 election: Latinos who voted for Trump. Between 2016 and 2020, Trump improved his overall support among Latinos by four percentage points, while Biden’s support declined from Hillary Clinton’s by one point — and in some places the change was even more significant. In Florida, Biden won Latinos by just five points, a massive swing from Clinton’s 27-point margin in 2016. In Texas, Trump closed the margin among Latino voters by 10 points.

To many progressives, the trend was a shock — how could a president who so brazenly denigrated Latinos and immigrants actually increase his stock among those same voters? — but it was also a wake-up call. For a generation, Democrats have taken comfort in the assumption that long-term demographics were on their side: As America became less and less White, Democrats would enjoy an increasing advantage in national politics. The growing Latino vote was a — maybe the — linchpin of this thinking. Which means that if, in fact, Latinos are drifting from Democrats, it constitutes an emergency for the party, one that could haunt them in 2022, 2024 and beyond.

Drawing on a number of conversations with experts, plus two with my dad, I recently spent time trying to figure out why this was happening. There are no simple answers, but I was particularly intrigued by one subplot of the story of Latino voters: Nationally, Biden won Latino men by 23 points but Latinas by 39 points. In 2016, Clinton won Latino men by 31

Between 2016 and 2020, Trump improved his support among Latinos by four percentage points. To many progressives, the trend was a shock — and a wake-up call.
points and Latinas by 44. In other words, Trump gained among both groups over four years, but he gained more among men. In some states, the 2020 gender disparity among Hispanic voters was quite dramatic. In North Carolina, Trump won Latino men by 20 points but lost Latinas by 54 points. In Nevada, Biden won Latino men by only six points but Latinas by 47 points. Why, I wondered, did Latino men seem to be shifting to the right? And what could Democrats do to win them back?

Writing about gender differences within the Latino vote is inherently thorny terrain. There's a long-standing, racist stereotype that associates Latino men with machismo — and, as we all saw for the past six years, Trump's political brand was built partly on an exaggerated macho sensibility. Ian Haney López, a law professor at the University of California at Berkeley, told me that there is a risk of reducing Latino men's support of Trump to being about machismo — which takes “a pervasive social dynamic” and makes it into “an attribute of Latino culture.” “Patriarchy is a problem across racial groups,” he says, though he adds: “It’s also fair to say if you’re a man in a low-status group, masculinity may become more important to claiming high status.”

A better place to start might be jobs: what the experiences of men and women look like in the American economy right now, and how that might influence their thinking about politics. Stephanie Valencia of EquisLabs, a Democratic research firm that surveyed Latino voters in 11 states starting in 2019, says that, in the run-up to the election, they found plenty of men who had what she called “Trump intrigue.” “They see him as the successful businessman, and they see him as somebody who has built himself up from his bootstraps, even though we all know that’s not necessarily true,” she told me.

That may contrast with the experiences of Latinas, many of whom are running their households, managing child care or employed as front-line and domestic workers — nurses or caretakers for the elderly. “They are making sure their kids are prepared for Zoom school,” Valencia explains. “I think there’s a fundamentally different experience that Hispanic men and women have in both what they experience day to day and what information they consume.”

Trump’s image as a straight-talking businessman was definitely part of what appealed to my dad. He liked that Trump was a graduate of the Wharton School and that the former president grew up with men similar to those who worked with my grandfather. “We’d run into the electrical contractor’s union or somebody else working in houses, building houses. Every one of them talked like Trump,” my dad said. “No big words. Everything was very, very simple. And Trump learned to do that. He learned to master that, where he can communicate.”

Kevin Marino Cabrera, formerly Trump’s Florida state director, cites the former president’s economic record from before the coronavirus pandemic, including “historic unemployment and employment for all minorities across the board.” And Tomas Robles, co-executive for the progressive activist group Living United for Change in Arizona, argues that Democrats haven’t done a good strategic job in this area. “They don’t know yet how to talk about the economy in a way that resonates with Latinos, especially men of color,” Robles says. “I think a big reason why Trump did slightly better with not just Latino men, but other men of color, especially Black men, was because he had an economic message, and he had an economic message that he tailored to men of color.” Indeed, Trump’s campaign ran a Spanish-language ad with a catchy jingle that specifically mentioned the economy.

Haney López has conducted research with Equis showing that 28 percent of Hispanics perceive themselves as part of a group that “over generations can get ahead through hard work.” He also found that 32 percent of Hispanics see themselves as a group similar to European American immigrants who can join the mainstream. “The rhetoric that the right is using uses language that is designed to trigger racist stereotypes associated with whiteness,” Haney López says. He adds that for many Latinos, there is a desire to be esteemed and recognized as someone who cares for their family rather than as a violent protester or as an outsider. “This status anxiety is inseparable from this racist hierarchy,” he says.

Both Latino men and women may share economic and status anxiety, of course. But Latinas — like female voters across ethnic categories — were repelled by Trump’s disrespect toward women and his bragging about sexual assault. “When we conducted focus groups with Latinas, they were highly attuned to the ways Trump was insulting them as women,” Haney López says. “They felt more attacked as women than they did as Latinos.”

In the constant push and pull between economic and cultural issues in the Democratic coalition, it’s possible that, for some Latino men, left-wing cultural politics have proved off-putting. It’s been well-documented at this point that most Latinos don’t use the gender-neutral term “Latinx,” but the male-female breakdown is noteworthy. According to Pew Research Center, 14 percent of Latinas between 18 and 29 use the term, but only 1 percent of Latino men in the same age group use it.
Valencia points out that younger Latino men are in the same social media spaces as their White counterparts. "They're watching Joe Rogan, too," she says, referring to the popular podcast host and antagonist of the cultural left. "They're consuming a lot of the same information that White working-class young men are consuming."

Randall Avila, the executive director of the Orange County Republican Party, says Latino men appreciated Trump’s lack of political correctness. “We kind of resonate with the president even though we may not agree with everything he says,” Avila told me. “He speaks his mind and he doesn’t sugarcoat things, so I think some of that personality style also played into Latino support for the president as well.”

News reports before and after the election speculated that Trump’s tough talk on immigration, as well as his “law and order” rhetoric, helped with some Latino men. In fact, especially in some border communities, law enforcement is a major employer of Latino men. According to Department of Homeland Security statistics for 2019, 30 percent of all U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers are Hispanic. (Hispanic men accounted for 11.8 percent of hires, while Hispanic women accounted for 8.1 percent.)

Of course, not all Latinos who work in law enforcement share Trump’s view of immigrants. David Cortez, a professor at the University of Notre Dame, interviewed Latino agents who worked for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Arizona, Texas and California in 2014 and 2015. Plenty of the people in the study tended to join the agency for economic reasons. Cortez says that, despite the ICE union’s support for Trump, not all Latinos who worked on the border fit the “MAGA, machismo” model of “right-leaning, staunch, anti-immigration restrictionists.” “What you’ll find is that the majority of them have more-nuanced positions on immigration and immigration policy than most elected officials,” says Cortez, who is from Brownsville, Tex., “because they’re the ones who see it on a daily basis.”

Still, it’s reasonable to assume that, if Democrats are seen as the party of open borders and far-left immigration policies, that might turn off at least some Latinos who work in border enforcement. Meanwhile, Latinos make up 12.5 percent of local police officers as of 2016, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, a jump from 7.8 percent in 1997 (and police forces are overwhelmingly male). And according to a 2017 Pew Research study, White and Latino police officers have similar views on the police killing of unarmed Black people — with 72 percent of both groups saying they were isolated incidents rather than signs of a broader problem. By comparison, 57 percent of Black police officers think the killings are signs of a bigger problem.

To progressives, all of this is a sinister example of politicians dividing a community against itself. “One of the perversities of dog-whistle politics, of this fearmongering against people of color,” says Haney López, “is that it has created a whole employment sector for working-class people in the area of government violence against working-class people, especially with people of color.”

But conservative Latinos themselves see things differently. Avila has three family members who work in the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. He says Trump’s “law and order” message resonated with many Latinos. “They saw the president as someone who stood up for them,” Avila says, “whether it’s my family that’s actually in law enforcement or family who obviously loves and cares about my uncles and my aunts. We kind of saw that message of who was supporting the police department and who wasn’t.”

There isn’t, of course, one clear explanation for why Latino men seem to be drifting, as a group, to the right. Every individual vote is a sum of many factors, and it’s tough to attach a simple explanation to any of them. Indeed, when I asked my dad about what he liked about Trump, he replied, “Oh my God, son, the list is endless.” As he walked around his neighborhood in January — 10 days after Biden was inaugurated — and spoke to me on the phone, he rattled off a litany of what he saw as Trump’s accomplishments: lower taxes, diplomatic agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors, the low Black and Latino unemployment rates before covid-19 wrecked the economy. He praised Trump’s tough stance on China and his move to subsidize farmers to offset the effects of his trade conflict.

None of these policy preferences are unique to Latinos or to Latino men. But when a group shifts dramatically, it’s impossible not to at least guess at broad explanations. And for Democrats, there’s a lot riding on trying to get these explanations right. Perhaps the most important thing to realize is that no party is entitled to a constituency. Every campaign has to work to actively court Latino voters. Instead of expecting — as many progressives do — Latino men to automatically vote against someone who works against their “self-interest,” it might be better to ask what Latino men actually see as their best interests and how they view themselves — and then adjust accordingly.

To be sure, different Latinos will respond to the same
message in disparate ways: A message like Sen. Bernie Sanders’s democratic socialism that resonated with Latinos in Nevada and California in the Democratic primary may terrify Cuban American and Venezuelan American voters in Miami who fled socialist regimes.

But one place that Democrats probably can’t go wrong is to focus relentlessly on jobs and the economy. José Dante Parra, who previously worked for Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and President Barack Obama’s reelection campaign and is now chief executive of the communications firm ProsperoLatino, thinks this is the best way to reach Latino men. “Doubling down on those policies and messaging it to the community will really help us, in the long run, develop a narrative where Latino men feel that they’re being talked to,” he says. “The biggest thing for Latino men was jobs and the economy ... being usually the main breadwinners in the family.”

With Republican senators like Josh Hawley and Marco Rubio trying to rebrand the GOP as a “multiethnic, multiracial working-class coalition,” Democrats will need to call their bluff by laying out a clear agenda for working-class Americans. If Latino men see themselves as aspirational Americans who want to pick themselves up by the bootstraps, perhaps the best message is one that offers a way into the middle class and economic security.

And none of this, by the way, is to suggest that Democrats should ignore Latina voters, who largely share similar priorities. (I should note here that my parents are divorced and my mom is a Democrat.) On the contrary, says Valencia at Equis, it is important to remember that working-class Latinas are voters who “we need to further understand and invest in to continue to make part of the progressive base, because on the issues they are there.”

Looking ahead to 2024, I asked my dad who he liked as a potential Republican presidential candidate. He was cagey about Trump’s children. In his eyes, Don Jr. is not ready yet and he “would probably never vote” for Ivanka. He likes Reps. Jim Jordan of Ohio, Chip Roy of Texas and Matt Gaetz of Florida — but, he said, “one day, I think the best president we have ever in our lifetime would be Tom Cotton,” the senator from Arkansas.

The day pro-Trump rioters crashed the Capitol trying to stop the certification of votes, my dad texted me to ask if I was safe and told me to “stay away from all the crowds in D.C.” However, he does not hold Trump responsible for what happened that day. “These are all good people, good levelheaded, hard-working people,” he says of those who supported the “Stop the Steal” rally, noting that Trump told protesters to let their voices be heard peacefully.

Democrats can certainly make inroads with Latino men — though my dad, as you can see, won’t be one of them. Instead, he’s a very stark reminder that Latinos span the political spectrum — and that, as confusing as it may be to progressives and to many pundits, it’s absolutely possible for some percentage of Americans to think of themselves as archconservatives and as Latinos. Even if he doesn’t “wear it on my sleeve,” as he puts it, my dad is very proud of his heritage as a Mexican American. In January, we ended our conversation as we normally do when I’m not interviewing him. “I love you with all my heart, Dad,” I said. “I love you too, mijo,” he replied. “You take good care.”

Eric Garcia is the author of the forthcoming book “We’re Not Broken: Changing the Autism Conversation.”
I had lived in the United States for 18 years but didn’t feel the need to become a citizen. 2020 changed all that.

My parents remember tasting metal in the air. It was days after they first heard rumors of an accident, maybe a fire, at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. We lived in Kyiv — Ukraine’s capital, about 100 miles away — and like everyone we were kept in the dark. Two days later a vague announcement on television confirmed that a reactor was “damaged” and that it was being handled. The Soviet government, at the time in charge of Ukraine, concealed the details of the explosion and downplayed the gravity of the deadly accident. But then the wind carrying radioactive particles changed direction south toward Kyiv. My family sequestered inside, sealing all the windows and doors.

People frantically snapped up iodized salt, recommended to prevent thyroid problems caused by radiation. I was a year old, and my mom soon took me to Leningrad — now St. Petersburg, Russia — to wait out the danger at a relative’s home. The little government trust that remained eroded as Soviet officials put lives in danger to save face.

Over the years, I internalized mistrust toward government. When I left Ukraine in 2002 after finishing high school — and 11 years after the country gained its independence — a group of crooks and oligarchs held power in a system so steeped in corruption that it seemed immune to change. Bribing was how you advanced in every aspect of life — from getting a bed at the hospital to passing a college exam to securing a promotion. Everyone did it. I saw my dad slip a bill to a police officer a few times to get out of a speeding ticket. I remember awkwardly handing champagne or chocolates to teachers who administered my exams. Nothing was clear-cut in a nascent democracy. So when I moved to the United States, I felt skeptical about whether my vote really mattered. Civic engagement seemed like an appealing concept that never played out in real life.
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STORY BY MARIYA MANZHOS /
PORTRAIT BY RICK FRIEDMAN
My Ukrainian parents, who hoped I’d build a life in the United States, repeatedly asked me over FaceTime: “When are you going to become an American citizen?”

In a way, America had been in my life long before I ever got here. As a result of a midlife religious awakening, my father was introduced to a pair of Mormon missionaries, who were allowed into the newly independent Ukraine in 1991. We hosted them at our apartment, my mom cooking up a feast every time: borscht, mayonnaise-dressed salads, pickled cabbage. They ate eagerly, gracious for our hospitality. Mormon missionaries were the first Americans I knew. They introduced me to peanut butter and Vanilla Ice. I found their optimism and upbeat dispositions endearing. Unlike us, they weren’t burdened with the practicalities of life.

Whether those were Mormon attributes or American, we couldn’t discern. For us, who had never encountered either, they were the same thing. As a result of these meetings, my father joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and two years later baptized my mom and me in a chlorinated swimming pool, an act that cracked open an entirely new future. Our relatives were baffled, even suspicious when my parents stopped drinking at family gatherings. And they were even more perplexed when my parents announced that they were sending me, their only child, across the ocean to go to a Mormon college in Provo, Utah.

On the campus of Brigham Young University, America appeared exactly as I’d dreamed. The abundant food in the cafeteria replenished at record speed, everyone smiled, and I could pick a major (humanities, much to my parents’ endless curiosity) based on my interests rather than family pressures or practical reasons. Students spoke out in class, sometimes contradicting the professor. And you could do it all without bribes. As I’d been taught, with God and hard work, anything was possible. Seeing people in Ukraine scramble to find work, my parents felt convinced that with fluent English and an American degree, the doors would open up for me.

Like many immigrants in the United States, I straddled two cultures, belonging to both and neither. I welcomed the tension because each culture brought out my affinity for the other. Leaving Ukraine, I packed a notebook filled with my favorite Ukrainian poems. When homesick, I whispered them to myself like little prayers. The cadence of the soothing Ukrainian words reminded me of belonging. But when I visited Ukraine, I longed for the things I missed in America: the casual dress code, the openness, the root beer and pizza. “I love being here and there,” I wrote in my journal. In between felt like freedom.

For the past three decades, Ukraine itself has existed in between, torn between its Soviet past and forces pulling it forward. In 2004, from my university apartment in Provo, I watched hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians rise in peaceful protests against fraudulent elections engineered by the stewards of the pro-Russian regime, waving orange flags and setting up a tent city in Kyiv’s center. This watershed moment showed an expression of democracy I hadn’t seen before at home. I yearned to be in Ukraine, amid the crowds on Maidan, the square I used to frequent after school. But I had a semester to finish, an internship to secure. A decade later, Ukrainians rose again to demand European integration in a series of protests that turned
Take a trip to Downtown Frederick. You could find yourself strolling along Carroll Creek Park — soaking in the public art, murals and placemaking projects that give this city its unique vibe — kicking back at one of our homegrown breweries, distilleries or wine shops — or spending a weekend exploring the 200+ independently-owned businesses right in your own backyard.
violent with riot police beating and shooting protesters, killing over 100 people. I wanted to be there to mourn, but by then, I'd put down roots in America: a child, a husband and a mortgage.

As I saw it, U.S. citizenship status didn’t seem like it would change my life in a drastic way. I had shed my accent. I had learned to blend in. I hardly felt alien. Nobody even suspected I came from another country. Besides, I liked holding on to my Ukrainian culture — the melodic language, the folk songs, the homemade borscht. My Ukrainian citizenship provided an anchor to my heritage that was otherwise ebbing entirely away.

Applying for American citizenship involved a tedious and expensive process for which there never seemed to be a good time. But as last year unfolded, one disaster after another, my parents’ question — the one I had heard dozens of times — resounded with a new, urgent force.

On a cold January day in 2020, I cradled my newborn daughter — a carbon copy of her older sister, the same hospital beanie full of auburn hair. The day she was born, the first covid-19 case was confirmed in the United States. In the coming weeks, I watched Donald Trump claim that the pandemic was under control, that the country was prepared. This overconfidence sounded familiar. At the same time, Trump’s first impeachment trial was unfolding in the news, Ukraine at the heart of the investigation. By then, Ukraine had been making the headlines for months after a whistleblower filed a complaint about the infamous call between Trump and newly elected president Volodymyr Zelensky. The terms “bribe,” “abuse of power” and “quid pro quo” swirled around in the news. But in an unusual reversal of roles, it was the U.S. president, the leader of the free world, who was under fire for abusing his office, not the Ukrainian president. America felt very different from the place I put down roots in: a child, a husband and a mortgage. I had left Ukraine too young to be eligible to vote, and the result was that, at 36 years old, I had never voted in my life. I’d watched histories of elections and just being tired.

But many people I encountered didn’t wait until elections to use their voices. As a local reporter in Winchester, a suburb of Boston, I marveled at the commitment of residents to issues that transcended their individual lives. In old-fashioned rooms with squeaky floors, residents sat through long meetings that ran late into the night, advocating for speed bumps at the school intersection, recycling programs and bridge repairs. In 2017, during the Women’s March on the Boston Common, which I attended with other mothers I knew, I found myself surrounded by women who did not sit around complaining about the president they ended up with, although they expressed plenty of rage and indignation. Instead, they wrote letters to their representatives, worked the phones, donated and protested. Often, returning home from those late-night meetings in Winchester, I felt the desire to shape my community, too.

In the spring of 2020, when we knew little and feared everything, the coronavirus pandemic raged on, cases and deaths mounting. As the despair deepened, the small things that I could do began to matter more. Calling a friend, making a meal for my kids or writing an email felt like victories. The thing that got me through the long days was a text thread with two other mothers in my neighborhood. We were an eclectic mix: a Ukrainian Mormon journalist, a Black early-childhood educator and a Jewish entrepreneur. Our exchanges became emotional threads about the challenges of home schooling, the 2020 elections and just being tired.

And then the nation rose in protest of police brutality after George Floyd’s death. My Black friend, outraged and blunt, texted: “If you’re not engaging, you’re part of the problem.” Her words hit me in the gut.

I wondered if I needed to be a U.S. citizen to fight for racial equality, or any form of social justice. But I’d realized that maybe my citizenship represented more than a tedious application that formed a legal bond between me and the American government. It was also a commitment to myself to try to do what’s within my control to heal this country — my country — not only at the polls but every day.

Unlike many other immigrants, I had a path to citizenship through my marriage to an American citizen. Yet it was a path I had neglected to pursue. Now, being passive no longer felt like a morally acceptable option. And so, after an exhausting day under quarantine last summer, when my husband and children were asleep, I opened the naturalization application.

The application included routine background information: previous employment, travels, children’s names and birth dates. I chuckled at what then seemed like a ludicrous set of questions: Did I have any ties to the Nazi government? Have I ever advocated to overthrow a government by violence? When I got to the oath, I paused. It asked if I would defend the Constitution and the law against foreign and domestic enemies, renounce my fidelity to other governments and serve in the military if needed. These questions demanded that I turn toward America fully. I was still a Ukrainian who loved folk songs and my grandmother’s varenyky — and in many ways, I always would be — but now I wanted to enact change in the country that had embraced me. Right then, answering “yes” felt like the truest way forward.

In the following weeks, passionate urges to vote and photos of friends clutching their mail-in ballots again overwhelmed my feed. On Election Day 2020, I opened an email to find that my civics test and naturalization interview were set up for December. The process was underway.

A month after I took my oath during a small ceremony in a sleek government building outside of Boston, a mob of extremists sieged the U.S. Capitol building in a violent riot, incited by Donald Trump himself. That afternoon, I blasted the local radio station in the kitchen, disrupting my son’s Pokémon show. On my computer I pulled up the horrifying footage of Trump supporters climbing the walls and breaking into offices. I wanted him to see these disturbing scenes, hoping he would
remember this moment in American history. He nestled next to me. “That is crazy, mom,” he said. “Shouldn’t Trump do something?”

My mind immediately leaped to those once ridiculous application questions. They did not seem so outrageous anymore. The people attempting to overthrow the government and threatening American democracy were betraying their own duty as citizens. And it made me furious.

I had escaped a corrupt, broken government that was unable to respond to disaster only to shockingly find myself in a similar situation in my new country. After I became a citizen, a friend told me I’d picked the wrong year to tie myself to America. But for me, it couldn’t have been a better time to become a U.S. citizen. It was in a moment of crisis, amid widespread fear and despair, that for the first time I saw myself as part of the American people and ready to fight for our future. ⚖️

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GLOVER PARK GRILL 2505 Wisconsin Ave. NW. 202-625-5400. gloverparkgrill.com. Open: Coffee and pastries daily 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.; dinner daily 5 to 9 p.m. Prices: Dinner appetizers $9 to $16, main courses $15 to $47. Delivery via DoorDash, Grubhub, Toast and Uber Eats. Accessibility: Outside deck is fronted with stairs; an ADA-compliant restroom is off the hotel lobby.

It may be familiar fare, but it flourishes

He made his name in Boston, but Michael Schlow belongs to Washington now. Look at the chef’s portfolio. No thanks to the pandemic, the James Beard award winner is down to a single place to eat in Massachusetts, whereas he’s been able to keep five establishments in the District and Virginia, including two branches of the beloved Alta Strada, home to the city’s best chicken parm.

One of his tales of endurance emerged late last year, when the hotel housing Schlow’s Italian-themed Casolare changed ownership and the new bosses invited the chef to envision a different dining experience. The result, Glover Park Grill, made its debut in November with Hamilton Johnson leading the kitchen. Johnson, who briefly cooked at the late Emilie’s on Capitol Hill, previously commandeered Honeysuckle downtown and, before that, the esteemed Southern sensation Vidalia. Chops ahoy, you could say.

Shrimp and grits are a specialty of chef Hamilton Johnson, and his version at Glover Park Grill is elevated by a shellfish emulsion.

No one perusing Johnson’s menu is likely to find surprises. There aren’t any. The list reads like a roll call of popular American dishes, from roast chicken to grilled steak. Familiar is not another word for Ambien, however, at least not at Glover Park Grill. The chef says he aspires to elevate the staples by making them “ours.”

Right off the bat, Johnson makes you glad you’re in his Grill. Potato-leek soup, sometimes a wallflower, turns into a talker at the table. Yes, you can taste potato and leeks, but the puree is
more for the faint taste of apple and smoked trout in the bowl, its surface shimmering with dill oil. Steak tartare will remind me of 2020 long after the pandemic has passed, given its Fauci-esque ubiquity. Still, I continue to delight in the many versions I’ve sampled, including the one here, in which creamy lemon-kissed aioli and crisp fried panko carpet the ruddy chopped beef. The crab cake channels Vidalia with its jumbo lump Maryland seafood, minimally bound with saltines, mayonnaise and lemon juice and dressed with a garland of black-eyed peas, gigante beans and smoked bacon — my kind of border patrol.

In contrast, “spicy” deviled eggs crackle with fried soppressata, but they’re on the same frequency as many first-time Zoomers: mute. The promised heat is elusive.

Like a lot of their peers, Schlow and Johnson are big on testing what they’re selling in boxes. Not every dish passes muster. The saucy, super-crunchy chicken wings Johnson created early on were good at the source but went limp in transit. Order the appetizer now and you find wings improved by a hit of chilies and brown sugar and double roasting. Neat touch: lightly pickled celery, for extra tang, along with a crumble of blue cheese. Buffalo, you’ve been warned.

Schlow says Johnson’s “passion and compassion” were deciding factors in selecting him over other chefs who auditioned for the job. So was his “clean” cooking, says Schlow. “There was nothing superfluous on the plate.”

Johnson says, “It’s a challenge to do things simpler,” rather than hide behind a lot of bells and whistles.

The proof is in the eating. At Glover Park Grill, pasta means housemade cavatelli and sweet lump crab in a barge, er, bowl strewn with toasted breadcrumbs, lemon zest and parsley. The richness of the dish is tempered by some kick, from crushed red pepper. Braised short ribs come with escorts of parsnip puree and grilled carrots, their earthiness heightened with a drizzle of coffee oil.

See a pattern? While the food is familiar, it tends to come with a little something or other to make it stand out. Steak, cooked the color you specify, is richer for its brush with bearnaise butter, and shrimp and grits, one of Johnson’s prize dishes, shines in part because the shrimp is merely kissed by the heat of its pan. Roasted red peppers and an orange shellfish emulsion lend color to the classic, which is staged in a blue bowl for even more flourish. Are we tired of Brussels sprouts yet? I’m charmed to see them as they’re served here — sliced, fried, tossed with sherry vinegar — alongside an inches-thick pork chop near a swab of sweet potato puree.

The Grill’s wood-burning oven is a welcome hand-me-down from Casolare and a good excuse to try a margherita pizza. The crust makes a sturdy canvas for tangy San Marzano tomatoes, a mere veneer of mozzarella and bright basil. (Sharing Johnson’s workspace is Schlow’s ghost kitchen, Little Prince Pizza, selling the obvious pies, plus wings, sandwiches and salads.)

Alex Levin, executive pastry chef for the Schlow Restaurant Group, follows Johnson’s example. There’s nothing out of the ordinary on his dessert list — takeout chocolate chip cookies are as easy to find these days as masks — although every sweet
The chocolate chip cookies at Glover Park Grill are engineered to be crisp on the outside and chewy in the center.

is about as good as it gets. Schlow says he loved Levin’s cookies, save for the cake-y texture they developed after a day or so. The pastry chef turned the challenge into one of the city’s best cookies by doubling the chocolate, halving the flour and swapping dark brown sugar for white. The new! improved! recipe makes for saucer-size cookies that are crisp on the outside and chewy toward the center. And I love the faint crunch of sea salt flakes atop each round.

There’s more to explore: Bread pudding flavored with chocolate and banana and sweetened with caramel sauce. Cheesecake streaked with Levin’s not-too-sweet raspberry jam. A mountain of whipped cream hides ice cream veined with what tastes like fudge in a nutty sundae. Levin’s tiramisu, buzzy with espresso, would be at home at an Italian roost. Speaking of coffee, the grill is open in the morning for java, housemade bagels, croissants, ham-and-cheese danishes and more.

The owners of the Glover Park hotel are poised to renovate the entire property, dining room included. At present, I’m only eating outside, where a spacious deck adjacent to the restaurant has been outfitted with a turquoise bar, a fire pit in one corner and plastic tarp to ward off rain but allow for a breeze. By the end of March, roll-up canvas sides, replete with windows, will replace what now look like shower curtains.

Tables are draped with linens, warmed by overhead heaters and spaced with safety in mind. Best of all, they’re loaded with comforts encouraging you to return.

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**KEY TO THE PREVIOUS SECOND GLANCE**

**MARCH 21**

1. Pink label
2. Lost mug
3. No handle
4. New mug
5. Seeing triple
6. No shadow
7. Missing peg
8. Reversed colors
9. Curly trunk
10. Extended
11. Flipped
12. Taller

**SOLUTION TO PUZZLE**

“DISTANCE LEARNING,” MARCH 21

1. MEW
2. ROUSE
3. SARA
4. PRIME
5. SAY
6. ALLAR
7. TROT
8. RECAY
9. SPIRITED
10. DEBATES
11. ALEXA
12. ONFIRE
13. SATAY
14. TATA
15. CARL
16. TAKING
17. PACK
18. FINAL
19. BIBLE
20. ENCODE
21. RON
22. LEAF
23. GAP
24. KIERO
25. LOG
26. BACTERIA
27. STUDEN
28. TUPPERWARE
29. HEAR
30. BY
31. SHELL
32. EAT
33. PANDA
34. OSAKA
35. DISAGREE
36. LEAH
37. SLEEVE
38. EAT
39. BARE
40. TENS
41. ENCAPSULATE
42. SCHOOLS
43. TN
44. SNAKED
45. BED
46. PANTS
47. FAT
48. STIR
49. BLIND
50. ALOR
51. GLUCKER
52. DOUGE
53. VAS
54. YOUR
55. NEAT
56. ROSA
57. TILE
58. TUDOR
59. RASPY
60. TREASURE
61. MEMORY
62. ACHOO
63. RAVI
64. LILIA
65. SUEY
66. KEEP
67. WIFE
68. KEVER
69. NECK
The home office

BY RANDY MAYS

Find the 12 differences in the photo of a home office desk in Herndon, Va., in September.

PUZZLE ANSWERS
See them online now at washingtonpost.com/secondglance or in next week’s issue of the magazine.

SEE YOUR PHOTO
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ACROSS
1 Sample of food
6 Tech devices cited among Popular Science's "Best of What's New" gadgets in 2010
11 Mushroom part
15 Pols like Pelosi
19 Next of kin, often
20 Tag line?
21 1915 victim of a German U-boat
23 Assemble hastily
24 Chewy candy version of a small horse?
26 ... and aahs
27 Huge mythical bird said to carry off elephants
28 Hari Kondabolu documentary "The Problem With ___"
29 Expires
30 Blunt directive to close up one's pants?
35 Piece of a pizza pie
37 Fall short
38 Spots for first shots
39 Stuck with the same old, same old
42 Traffic stopper
45 Excellent, in 1990s rap lyrics
46 Ed with seven Emmys
48 Athlete on a country club staff
50 Shinzo, Japan's longest-serving prime minister
51 Romance down under?
56 Mastermind game pieces
58 Greenish blue
59 Wetlands
60 Bag brought to the beach
61 Dazed states
63 Tree dweller given to napping and munching all day
65 Like most pasta
67 Typical features of Elle or Marie Claire photo shoots?
71 Left undamaged
73 What a multicolored flag might symbolize
74 Put up

DOWN
1 Pulsate
2 A serious group?
3 Tourist attraction
4 "I would never lie to you!"
5 Sci-fi forte
6 Fort Knox blocks
7 Joe's refuge
8 Place for some PIN money
9 Murky
10 Spot for a mud bath
11 Minor mistake
12 Ballerinas' skirts
13 Superlative suffix
14 Bowler maker
15 Smartly dressed

Please enjoy this special guest crossword.
Evan Birnholz's puzzle will return next week.
Tooth and consequences

I am writing this on the last day of last month, which happened to be an official American day of celebration that you, treasonously, failed to acknowledge. It was National Tooth Fairy Day.

Tooth Fairy Day was created in the mid-1920s (evidently a subset of the flapper era known as the Boring ’20s) by a consortium of American dentists and other do-gooders devoted to oral hygiene for children. They wanted to help balance the fear of the pain of tooth-losing with the joy of accumulating wealth. The fairy conceit was a no-brainer: Existence of fairies was pretty much a given at the time, in part due to Arthur Conan Doyle, the walrus-jowled creator of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle spent his final years of life annihilating his reputation as a paragon of logic and reason: He endorsed a set of obviously doctored photographs purporting to show gossamer-winged fairies frolicking in the English countryside with two adorable little girls. The adorable little girls, it would turn out decades later, were malicious little liars.

No one at the time claimed the Tooth Fairy was real (it was mom ‘n’ dad, as every mom ‘n’ dad knew), but thanks to Doyle the platform for the myth — the possibility of the existence of fairies — seemed like solid forensic science. The Tooth Fairy was a plausible bit of nonsense.

I always loved the idea of the character and pursued it obnoxiously with my own children, using it as an opportunity for education. My older kid, Molly, was a bit too serious, so she had a gruff tooth fairy named “Fred.” In their epistolary correspondence, conducted night by night in messages left under the pillow, Fred made it clear that he was a paunchy, misanthropic, middle-aged man with a five o’clock shadow and a toothpick in his mouf, and years of lousy damn human experience that taught him that only kids could be trusted, if warily. He negotiated tooth prices with Molly in days-long back-and-forth communication, and she generally won, but only after showing gumption. Their final exchange was at age 7, involving Molly’s very last baby tooth, and she was angling for a major payout. She importuned Fred to notice the blood on the cuspid and to imagine the agony surrounding its expulsion from her mouth. (I have since ascertained from Molly, who is now 39, that she knew this was Dad and was manipulating him with abandon.) Molly got five bucks, and Fred let her know it was frickin’ highway robbery.

My younger kid, Dan, was a bit of a hellion, who, classically, Resisted Authority. His tooth fairy wrote to him on letterhead (computers and printers had evolved by 1989) from the office of “Bernard Fenstermann, attorney at law, and Tooth Fairy.” All of the letters read like this: “Dear Mr. Weingarten: Please accept, herein contained, 1 (One) Dollar in American currency as payment in full for 1 (One) infant molar retrieved from beneath 1 (One) pillow which itself was beneath 1 (One) human head on the night of April 3 at the following address ...”

Dan grumbled and groused about Bernard Fenstermann, Esq., with inventive vocabulary. He felt lowballed but accepted the offers grudgingly. He was outraged, if impotent. Sort of like a newspaper columnist. I was pleased.

Tragically, there was never any third kid, so I never got to try out another Tooth Fairy. I have lots of them, though, still in my noggin. (One of them, Lucretia the Tooth Fairy, is at least mildly evil. She extorts.)

Anyway, I have two grandkids now, so all is not lost. Molly will have to agree, of course, but she will. I could always sic Fred on her again. She respected him, if not me.

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