

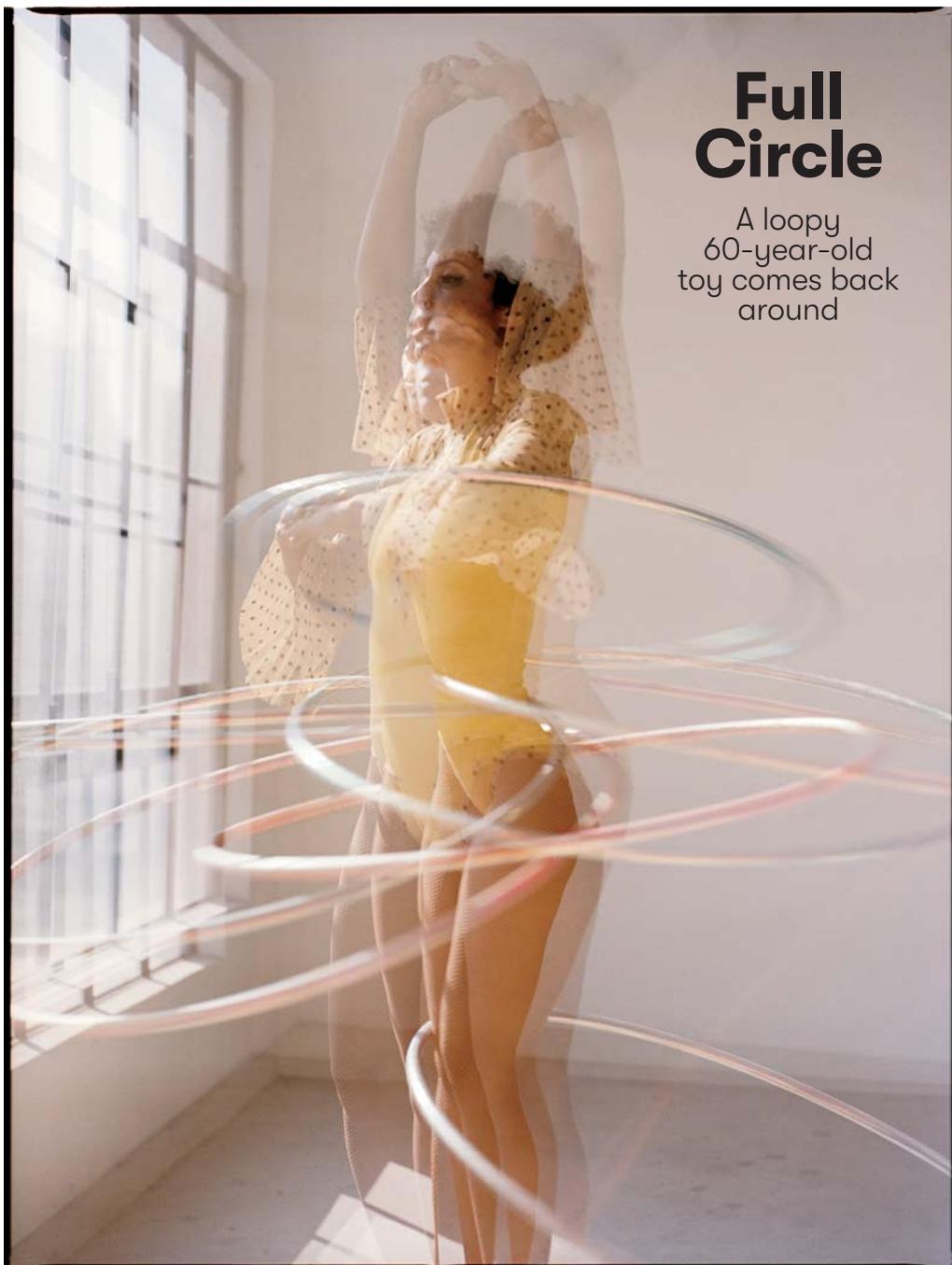
THE PAST IS

prologue

By
Alec Scott

Photograph by
Lauren Crew

AMERICAN ICON



Full Circle

A loopy
60-year-old
toy comes back
around

◀ Marawa Ibrahim holds the record for most hula hoops spun simultaneously: 200.

T



In an effort to keep the fad alive, Wham-O created new hoops, including one in 1982 that smelled of mint.

THE WOMEN IN the black-and-white videos wear Breton striped shirts, like those favored by Audrey Hepburn, and knee-high socks. Each has a hula hoop, or many of them. They swing them around their waists, but also around their wrists and elbows, shoulders and knees. A brunette in a bob rotates a hoop around her thighs, then does it while balancing on one leg before climbing the circle up her torso and into the air—a move called the “pizza toss.” This could be a scene from 1958, the year the United States went dizzy for hula hoops, except for the thousands of Instagram followers and the hashtags that accompany the videos: #hoop #tricks #skillz. The acrobats are Marawa’s Majorettes, a troupe of hyper hoopers led by Marawa Ibrahim. They’ve performed at the Olympics, set hooping world records and are among those credited with resurrecting the oh-so-’50s phenomenon for the age of social media.

The hula hoop was a fad that seemed destined to fade, like pet rocks, Beanie Babies and (one can hope) fidget spinners, but as it celebrates its 60th birthday, the plastic circle is trending.

It was Richard Knerr and Arthur “Spud” Melin, founders of the Wham-O toy company, who transformed a popular Australian toy, the cane hoop, into a space-age craze. They made the ring out of lightweight and inexpensive plastic, trademarked a name that evoked the still-exotic Territory of Hawaii and its kinda sexy but still family-friendly

hula dance and then launched a marketing campaign that was downright viral. The men took the hoops to Los Angeles parks, demonstrated the trick to kids and sent a hoop home with everyone who could keep it spinning. Company executives took the hoops on plane trips, hoping fellow passengers would ask about the odd carry-ons. And Wham-O tapped the powerful new medium of television with hokey, seemingly homemade advertisements. The word spread. The company sold more than 20 million hula hoops in six months.

Sales never again reached those heights, yet the plastic child’s toy has evolved over the years into art, exercise, even a form of meditation. (The rhythm of hooping helps clear the mind, devotees say.) It has been adopted by both counterculture—it is a fixture at Burning Man—and digital culture. This summer, a company called Virfit introduced the Vhoop fitted with sensors and a Bluetooth transmitter to monitor a user’s every twist and turn via smartphone app, marrying the quintessential 1950s obsession to the latest fitness-tracking fad. The price got an update, too: Wham-O’s original hula hoop sold for \$1.98; the Vhoop is a much more modern \$119. ♦

FIVE NEW WORLD RECORDS WERE SET IN THE LAST YEAR. Still unclaimed: the title for solving Rubik’s Cube fastest while hooping

245

Most hula hoops caught and spun in one minute

SHENG XUE
CHINA

23.39
seconds

Fastest time to climb 50 stairs while hula-hooping

ASHRITA FURMAN
USA

16ft 10in

Diameter of largest hula hoop spun

YUYA YAMADA
JAPAN

203

Most hula-hoop rotations on the leg in the arabesque position in one minute

ASHLEE MALE
UK

00:16:13

Longest time to balance a hula hoop on the head while swimming

DAVID RUSH
USA

THE WIDE

AMERICANS QUICKLY exported the fad, but not everyone was thrilled. Police in Japan outlawed hooping in the street because it “contributed ... to traffic accidents.”

IN THE UNITED KINGDOM,

doctors reported a rash of patients with neck and abdomen pain. The *British Medical Journal* dubbed it “Hula Hoop Syndrome.”

Joan Anderson's original from Australia

INITIALLY CONSIDERED

a “healthy sport” in Indonesia, hooping was later banned in several cities. The toy, authorities said, “awakens sensuality.”

WHIRL OF

WHILE SOME COMMUNIST

nations embraced hooping, China vilified the “nauseating craze” and Soviet critics attacked the capitalist obsession as “undignified” and “uncultured.”

The new smartphone-connected Vhoop

HOOPLA

HULA GIRL

At 94, **JOAN ANDERSON**, the subject of the new documentary short *Hula Girl*, is finally getting her due for helping kick off the country’s hoop mania six decades ago. She spoke with us from California.

When did you first spot the hoop? It was 1957. I was visiting my family in Sydney, Australia, and while I was at my sister’s house, I heard people in the back room laughing and carrying on. I said, “What’s this all about?” and my sister said, “It’s a new kind of toy called the hoop.” People all over were doing it. It looked like fun, but it was really hard. I couldn’t do it at first.

Did you bring one home to Los Angeles? It wasn’t possible to bring one on the plane, but I told my husband about it. He had dabbled in the toy business and thought it might be something he’d be interested in producing, so I wrote to my mother and asked her to send me one. The man who delivered it to the door said, “Who would have something like this delivered all the way from Australia?” I’ve often wondered if he put it together that it was the first hula hoop.

What did your American friends think of this wacky Australian fad? We had the hoop at our house for months. The kids played with it and we showed it to our friends. One night one of them said, “You know, you look like you’re doing the hula.” I said, “There’s the name: hula hoop!”

You showed the hoop to the founders of the Wham-O toy company. Spud Melin interviewed us in the parking lot of the Wham-O plant in San Gabriel Valley, and I showed him how to use it. He said, “Is there anything else you can do with it?” He took it and kind of rolled it to see if it would come back to him. “It’s got possibilities,” he said. The next thing we knew, Spud called from a show at the Pan-Pacific in Los Angeles: “It’s crazy around the booth. Everyone is trying it. It’s really gone wild!”

Did you make a business deal? It was a gentleman’s handshake. “If it makes money for us, it’ll make money for you,” Spud said. “We’ll take care of it.” Well, they didn’t do a very good job. We were involved in a lawsuit with Wham-O. In the end they said they lost money, because the sales died suddenly.

Today, no one knows about your part in creating the hula-hoop craze. In the beginning, everyone knew. Then I think they began to wonder if that was true or not, because we didn’t get any recognition for it. Wham-O was the one that made the hula hoop big, but we brought it to the United States. I’m thrilled that the story—and the movie—is out there now.



BIRDS IN HAND

Tally ho! When English swan lovers come to their census



MEANDERING MORE THAN 200 miles through southern England, the River Thames has been the setting for history both momentous and quirky. Take, for example, swan upping. “It’s a purely British thing,” explains the London-based photographer **Julia Fullerton-Batten**, who reimaged the centuries-old practice as part of her series *Old Father Thames*. In medieval England, swans were valuable articles of trade. By law, the beautiful birds

▲ Royal swan uppers now wear scarlet jackets, but they still pilot traditional rowing skiffs. The 2018 swan upping will begin July 16.

belonged to the crown—all except those marked by other official swan owners during the annual swan upping (or census). The custom still takes place each July, although now only to count the fowl and check their health. For her cinematic composite image, Fullerton-Batten consulted with a retired swan upper, recreated 1950s-era uniforms, gathered authentic tools—and hired a trained swan, which was more likely to behave. “The whole thing looks a little surreal,” she says, “so it was important that it felt believable.” ♦

JULIA FULLERTON-BATTEN



By
Dan Jones

Photographs by
Kristina Krug

◀ Joseph A. Auteri, Grand Treasurer of the Temple of Jerusalem, prepares to induct new knights and dames into the order.

The American Crusade

Disbanded seven centuries ago, the most famous of the medieval Christian orders is fighting for new conquests

J

JOSEPH A. AUTERI raises his sword and brings it down through a layer of yellow icing, cutting a large birthday cake in half.

A couple of hundred people cheer.

The crowd is mostly dressed in business attire, but Auteri is wearing medieval-style armor: a shirt of steel-link mail, a mail coif on his head, plate armor on

his shoulders and white linen robes emblazoned with a red cross. The outfit weighs 65 pounds and can cause problems for airline baggage handlers. His sword, modeled on one from the Ridley Scott movie *Kingdom of Heaven*, is not battle sharp, but it cuts sponge cake easily enough.

By day Joe Auteri, 49, is a partner in a financial planning company based in Pennsylvania. This evening, though, he ◀

is Hugh de Payns, a French knight who died in 1136 after establishing a military order known as the Knights Templar.

It is Memorial Day weekend and we are in a hotel in Nashville, Tennessee, where about 350 members of the autonomous Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem have gathered to mark the 900th birthday of the Knights Templar. Members of the charitable organization, known by the unwieldy abbreviation SMOTJ, regard themselves as spiritual descendants of the original Templars. It's a historical legacy many groups vie for, and in that regard the SMOTJ's celebration is off to an inauspicious start: Most scholars date the foundation of those first Templars to 1119 or 1120, making the order today just 898 or 899 years old.

No matter. The assembled are eager to get the party started, and the cake-cutting kicks off a weekend that will culminate in the dubbing of seven new "knights" and "dames" in a ritual the official literature says will "prepare you for the great works you have yet to complete."

THE ORIGINAL Knights Templar—shorthand for the Order of the Poor Knights of the Temple of Jerusalem—were founded to protect Christian pilgrims on the roads of Palestine following the First Crusade; the group was named for its original headquarters on the Temple Mount. Members were often called "warrior monks," since they fought on the front line of the crusades and swore oaths of chastity, poverty and obedience.

In their day, though, the Templar organization was rich. It owned property stretching from Britain to Syria, profits from which were used to fund military expeditions in the Holy Land and charitable deeds across the West. The order boasted considerable financial acumen, providing international banking and credit-transfer services. It counted the pope and kings of France among its clients. Its knights were also renowned for bravery in battle—one Muslim writer called them "the fiercest fighters" of all the crusaders.

However, beginning on Friday 13th October 1307 the Templars were destroyed in a process instigated by the French king Philip IV "The Fair" and abetted by Pope Clement V. The Templars had been tainted



▲ At the investiture ceremony these members of the order will represent the nine knights who, some sources say, made up the original Knights Templar.

by the final failure of the crusades in 1291; they were also victims of the French king's chronic shortage of money. Templar brothers across Europe were arrested, charged with crimes including sodomy, blasphemy and worshipping false idols; they were imprisoned, tortured and forced to make false confessions. In March 1312 a church council formally abolished the order. Its property was confiscated and its members stripped of their rank. In 1314 the last Master, Jacques de Molay, was burned at the stake in Paris.

That grisly demise has lent the Templars lasting notoriety and a thick shrouding of myth. They crop up regularly in modern entertainment, most famously in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, which cast them as the shadowy guardians of ancient religious secrets, and more recently in the video game franchise *Assassin's Creed*, which transforms them into time-traveling supervillains. The Templars have also been widely revived and imitated for purposes both benign and sinister since at least 1737, when the Scottish Freemason Andrew Michael Ramsey wrote a pseudo-history of Masonry that claimed ties to the medieval Templars.

Today Templar revivalism remains strong. Templar iconography is popular with European neo-fascists: The Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik claimed to be a Templar, and Knights Templar International is an online network that connects far-right activists, particularly in Britain. In Mexico, a drug cartel called *Los Caballeros Templarios* has borrowed from Templar symbolism to create its own brand and code of honor. Templar imitation is enduringly popular but seldom historically literate. ➔

Yet the Templars I meet in Nashville are mostly fascinated by the history, at times exhaustingly so. They have recently self-published a long, painstakingly footnoted book about Templarism over the centuries. Their internal literature liberally cites medieval texts such as those of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who wrote the original Templars' quasi-monastic rules. For the men and women I encounter, being a 21st-century Templar is about far more than medieval cosplay with a donation cup: It is participation in a living metaphor for evangelical Christian ad-

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**WE BELONG TO THE MOST
 PRESTIGIOUS ORDER OF
 KNIGHTHOOD ON THE PLANET.**
 ”

vocacy, financial expertise, internationalism and a militaristic ethos of duty and service to the cause. As Auteri puts it, “The only thing we don’t do is fight.”

SMOTJ was founded in the 1960s under the umbrella of an older, international network of Templar revivalists called Ordo Supremus Militaris Templi Hierosolymitani, which was itself formally recognized by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1805. The worldwide organization claims 5,000 members, 1,500 of whom are the knights and dames of the American SMOTJ. They are attached to 33 priories from Arizona to Wisconsin, and many stay in touch via a closed-membership smartphone app. The SMOTJ is far from the only Templar revivalist organization in the United States: There is a separate Masonic order, and various other non-Masonic groups with online presences. To try to combat confusion, SMOTJ has a legal officer called the Grand Avocat who works on registering trademarks to guard its brand identity.

The main function of the tax-exempt SMOTJ is raising money for Christian causes in the Holy Land: funding schools and scholarships in places like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Bethany and Ramleh, and sponsoring children through Christian schools. Last year donations totaled \$407,945. But members also sit in an advisory capacity on committees in the United Nations, and claim informal involvement in international diplomacy. Some dream of one day having the order restored to papal favor with recognition by the Vatican.

There are also perks of membership. It’s good networking, with regular opportunities to wear uniforms, accrue titles and hang out with other like-minded Christians who get a kick from sharing a romantic, medieval past.

Auteri maintains that there is a seriousness to the dress-up. “We are all brought together because of the ideals of a chivalric order,” he says. “It takes a group of people with a common belief and a common cause to stop the persecution and the exile of Christians.” The outgoing head of the organization, the 20th Grand Prior, a smooth-spoken financier named Patrick Michael Carney, justifies it in simpler but more telling terms: “We belong to the most prestigious order of knighthood on the planet.”

THE EPISCOPAL Christ Church Cathedral is packed when the seven new inductees—or “postulants”—take their pews at 3 p.m. on Saturday. The knights and dames who join them wear white mantles with red crosses. Many men wear military formalwear underneath. (The modern order recruits strongly from the officer classes of the U.S. military. In Nashville I meet several one- and two-star generals and many colonels, majors and captains.) A 2-year-old Rottweiler service dog named Tique wears a Templar-themed doggy jacket.

There are plenty of women present: In the 1990s, the order, seeking to maximize membership, forsook medieval rules that argued “the company of women is a dangerous thing . . . let not ladies be admitted.” One of the postulants is Barbara Prate, a bright, occasionally caustic 45-year-old nurse from New Jersey. She has dressed for the occasion in a red business suit and high heels. Four days ago, Barbara and Joe Auteri got married; between preparing for her own investiture Barbara has been helping Joe in and out of his Hugh de Payns outfit.

The service takes three hours. When the postulants are dubbed, they kneel and Carney taps them on the shoulders with a sword. Another official touches a riding spur to their heels. The night before the ceremony there had been some discussion as to whether the tradition of kneeling is vital. A couple of the postulants are older: One is an elderly ex-Marine who fought in the Korean War and no longer gets up and down easily.

After the dubbings come many awards. I count 27, mostly promotions to various quasi-military orders of merit. There is a ceremonial changing of Grand Prior. The Grand Webmaster is given a meritorious service award. The Grand Archivist gets a medal.

A Muslim data analyst and faith leader from New York is inducted into the order of merit and given white robes (presented without a red cross); he is lauded for bringing faith groups together. I wonder if everyone is pleased. Over lunch one Templar told me, “We don’t want any Muslims,” because followers of Islam “don’t respect anybody.” His diatribe didn’t

stop there. Although it is all plainly nonsensical, ambivalence toward Muslims is in tune with Templar history; many of the original order died fighting Islamic armies, yet the 12th-century Syrian writer Usama ibn Munqidh praised the Templars for clearing a space in their chapel in Jerusalem so he could pray toward Mecca.

Once the service is complete, the Templars shuffle out of church and return to their hotel for a cocktail reception and dinner. During the meal I feel a hand on my shoulder, and a knight whose name I do not catch leans in and whispers conspiratorially, “We were there”—I assume he means the Holy Land—“for 160 years, and they tried to kick us out but we survived.”

“Don’t forget, we were God’s shock troops.”

This is pure fantasy. But on balance, the expressions of historicist foolishness and idle prejudice are few compared with accounts of money donated and distributed to schoolchildren in faraway lands, and

advocacy for peace through respectable bodies by organizations like the U.N.

Later, as the night winds down, we stand on a roof terrace overlooking the street outside the hotel. Honky-tonk music drifts up from the bars below. Two dozen or so Templars—mostly middle-aged guys—are killing beers and whiskey and chomping fat cigars. A couple are talking about St. Bernard of Clairvaux’s philosophy. Others are brainstorming ways to raise money for Templar archaeology in Israel. A retired general discusses the possibility of using contacts in the worldwide organization to conduct back-channel diplomacy between the United States and Russia.

They are all in earnest, and having the time of their lives. I think of something a fellow guest sitting next to me in church said as we sat through the many medal-givings and commendations earlier.

“There’s a lot of batshit crazy here,” she murmured. “All of it with good intent.” ♦

Cold War

Fight or Flight

HOPES FOR A COLD WAR DÉTENTE WERE SKY HIGH WHEN THE FIRST AMERICAN AND SOVIET FLIGHTS TOOK OFF 50 YEARS AGO

By Sasha Issenberg



Illustration by Mike McQuade

THE THREAT CAME this past April: Aeroflot, Russia’s state-run airline, was considering halting flights to the United States in response to America’s failure to promptly issue visas to its crew. It was just a bit of mile-high saber rattling, but it showed that

airline diplomacy is alive and well 50 years after the first breakthrough flights between the USSR and the USA signaled a brief thaw in the Cold War.

Tensions were still high less than six years after the Cuban missile crisis when Pan Am Flight 44 took off for Moscow on July 15, 1968. (First-class passengers dined on caviar and beef stroganoff.) That same day an Aeroflot jet landed in New York and was met by a crowd of 2,000 people. “The tourist plane and the bomber for years have been racing each other toward a photo finish,” longtime Pan Am chief executive Juan Trippe had said as he pushed for the flights.

Former U.S. ambassador to the USSR Charles Bohlen hoped the new route would “contribute to peace and stability in the world.” Yet a month later, Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia to halt the Prague Spring. “It is a pity that our hosts have acted so badly in the days since the flight,” Bohlen noted. All U.S.-Soviet flights were suspended by 1981; direct service resumed in 1986 after high-level negotiation.

Despite its limits, jet-fueled diplomacy is still in the superpower playbook. In December, a Chinese charter landed in Antarctica—a step toward China’s goal of running the first regular commercial air service to the icy continent. The route would serve bucket-list travelers, but some observers also see it as a geopolitical move, part of China’s long game to establish a presence at the pole to gain future access to its coal, oil and other as-yet-unclaimed resources. ♦

By Rachel St. John

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Today's raging border controversy began with a surprising incident 100 years ago this summer

IN EARLY AUGUST 1918, Felix B. Peñaloza, the *presidente municipal*, or mayor, of Nogales, Mexico, ordered construction of a fence running along the boundary line between his city and Nogales, Arizona. The fence would consist of six wires strung to a height of six feet. His intent was to direct the flow of people crossing the border through two gateways, to make it easier for a growing number of soldiers, customs agents and other officials to oversee transborder movement. Peñaloza also met with U.S. representatives to discuss a second, parallel fence, to be built by

States and Mexico in the spirit of “good fences make good neighbors.” But the proposed American fence became what was most likely the first permanent barrier to control the movement of people across the U.S.-Mexico border.

Peñaloza’s fence cut through the heart of the twin cities of Nogales—known as Ambos Nogales, “Both Nogales.” Founded in 1882, Ambos Nogales became a bustling community centered on the boundary line, which ran along International Street. For years Mexicans and Americans crossed the border regularly to do business, shop, socialize and celebrate the holidays of both nations. Years later, former residents recalled how they had even played on the line as children.

Tensions along the border started to rise with the Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, and were heightened by the First World War. A violent battle between opposing Mexican forces took place in Nogales, Mexico, in 1913. A second battle in the town two years later saw U.S. cavalrymen cross into Mexican territory to engage Pancho Villa’s troops, who had fired across the line. The wars also fueled worries about smugglers running guns into Mexico, refugees fleeing to the United States and international espionage in the borderlands.

The U.S. government had built its first border fence between 1909 and 1911—a barbed wire divide along the California border—to prevent cattle from wandering between the countries. Now, as both nations adopted new measures to monitor the border, more fences began to appear. Photographs seem to show one beside the customs house near Tijuana and another along the border between Douglas, Arizona, and Agua Prieta, Mexico. These were likely temporary wartime measures, and as in Nogales, they were intended to prevent cross-border clashes.

But on August 27, 1918, soon after Mexican workers had erected the fence in Nogales, conflict broke

out when an unidentified man attempted to cross into Mexico. A U.S. customs inspector ordered him to halt, but he did not stop. Officers on both sides

CONFLICT BROKE OUT WHEN AN UNIDENTIFIED MAN ATTEMPTED TO CROSS INTO MEXICO.

of the border raised their guns, and a firefight broke out. About two hours later, at least 12 Mexicans and Americans had been killed, including Peñaloza, who had built the fence precisely to minimize the risk of conflict between the nations.

Ironically, despite his failure, U.S. officials in Nogales, Arizona, soon went ahead with plans for their own fence—which quickly became a model for controlling the movement of people across the U.S.-Mexico border. Following Nogales’ lead, officials in Calexico, California, erected a fence that

ran two miles along the boundary line there. By the 1920s, fences were a fixture in most border towns.

Over time, the fences were put to a new use. In the 1940s, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service coordinated with the International Boundary and Water Commission to erect chain-link barriers on the border. More fences, a border patrolman later acknowledged, forced unauthorized migrants through dangerous mountains, deserts and rivers “around the ends of the fence.” The U.S. expansion of the fencing in the 1990s doubled-down on this strategy, leading to a dramatic increase in the number of migrants who died attempting the treacherous crossing. Thus the fences and other barriers that stand along much of the U.S.-Mexico border now mark not only an international boundary but also a humanitarian crisis. ♦



▲ A metal obelisk marked the international border in Ambos Nogales circa 1913. American (left) and Mexican (right) sentries patrolled the line.

the Americans. Mexican officials said they “would welcome the building of such a fence by the United States Government, as it would aid officials on both sides of the line in enforcing their regulations,” and they insisted that “such action would not be irritating or offensive to Mexican sentiment.”

Today a ten-mile-long rusted steel border wall is a defining feature of the cities. Its origin story begins with these two fences. When they were first erected in Nogales a century ago, they were neither a brazen political statement nor a barrier to immigrants, but a cooperative measure, embraced by both the United

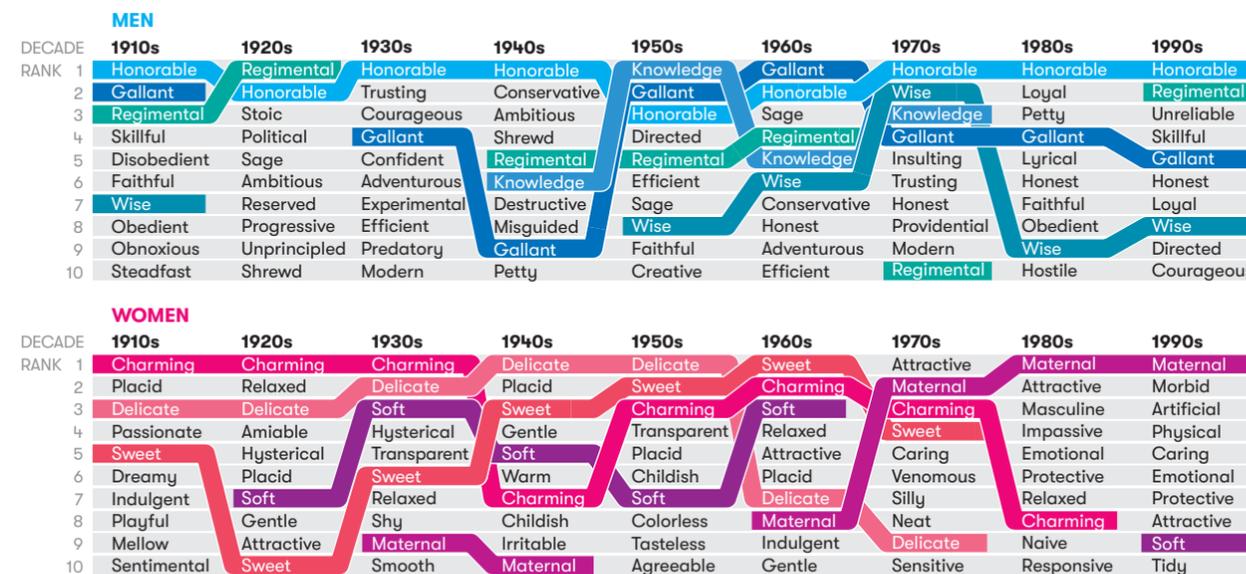
Language

Sexually Speaking

DID WOMEN STOP BEING CHARMING THREE DECADES AGO? WE DON'T think so. But the word *charming*, associated with women far more often than men from 1910 into the 1980s, was overtaken by words like *attractive* by the 1990s, according to a Stanford University analysis of about 79,000 American texts (including novels, nonfiction books and periodicals). Researchers studied more than 500 words related to personality, identified those tied most closely to men or women, and traced how usages changed as attitudes toward gender have evolved—or haven't.

TODAY
Analysis of online news and Wikipedia entries reveals modern biases associated with men and women.

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| MEN | WOMEN |
| Open | Calm |
| Fair | Ruined |
| Aspiring | Careless |
| Conservative | Gracious |
| Energetic | Sentimental |
| Unstable | Mistaken |
| Fraudulent | Humorous |
| Cultured | Fearful |
| Unreliable | Proud |
| Predatory | Passionate |



WIKI COMMONS

ANALYSIS BY NIKHIL GARG, LONDA SCHIEBINGER, DAN JURAFSKY AND JAMES ZOU. SOURCES: 1910s-1990s, CORPUS OF HISTORICAL AMERICAN ENGLISH; TODAY: WIKIPEDIA AND ENGLISH GIGAWORD

Graphic by Matthew Twombly

“
CUSTOMERS HAD NO IDEA WHAT
TEQUILA WAS. THEY'D ASK MY DAD,
'WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS?'
”

THE WAY MARIANO Martinez tells it, accounts of the margarita's beginnings should be taken with a grain of salt—and a wedge of lime. Martinez is the creator of what is arguably the 20th century's most epochal invention—the frozen margarita machine—and, at the age of 73, the Dallas restaurateur is an indisputable authority on the cocktail in the salt-rimmed glass.

The origin stories date to the '30s and tend to feature a Mexican showgirl or a Texas socialite and a bartender determined to impress her. One of Martinez's favorites involves a teenage dancer named Margarita Carmen Cansino who performed at nightclubs in Tijuana. “After Margarita got a contract from a Hollywood studio, she changed her name to Rita Hayworth,” he says. “Supposedly, the drink was named in her honor.”

When it comes to margarita lore, about the only thing for certain is that on May 11, 1971, Martinez pulled the lever on a repurposed soft-serve ice cream dispenser and filled a glass with a coil of pale green sherbet—history's first prefab frozen margarita. The beverage was teeth-chatteringly cold with a proper tequila face-slap. Happy hour (and hangovers) would never be the same.

By adapting mass-production methods to blender drinks, Martinez elevated the frozen margarita from a border-cantina curiosity to America's most popular cocktail. The innovation forever changed the Tex-Mex restaurant business (placing bars front and center) and triggered the craze for Tex-Mex food.

Befitting a musician who once recorded three versions of “La Bamba” on an EP titled *Lotta Bamba*, the convivial Martinez has a fresh, boyish manner and a beaming smile. He grew up in East Dallas, where at age 9 he started bussing tables at El Charo, his father's Mexican eatery. “The customers were mostly Anglos who often had no idea what tequila was,” he recalls. “They'd show up with a souvenir

Slush Fun

A Texas restaurant owner blended tequila, ice and automation. America has been hung over ever since

bottle a friend had brought back from a vacation in Mexico, and ask my dad, ‘What do we do with this?’”

Though at the time liquor couldn't be sold by the drink in Texas restaurants, the elder Martinez occasionally would whip up frozen margaritas in a blender for his patrons. (Introduced at a 1937 restaurant show in Chicago and bankrolled by bandleader Fred Waring, the humble Waring Blendor revolutionized bar drinks.) The elder Martinez used a recipe gleaned while working at a San Antonio speak-easy in 1938: ice, triple sec, hand-muddled limes and 100 percent blue agave tequila. The secret ingredient was a splash of simple syrup.

In 1970 an amendment to the state constitution made liquor by the drink legal, in cities or counties when approved in local-option elections. Shortly after Dallas voted yes, the younger Martinez launched Mariano's Mexican Cuisine in a shopping center near the campus of Southern Methodist University. On opening night, the amiable owner appeared



Sales of premium tequila have surged in the U.S.: An aged bottle may cost \$30,000.

in a bandido costume. And customers, serenaded by a mariachi band, were encouraged to order margaritas made from the old family recipe. Libations were poured faster than you could say “One more round.” The second night wasn’t quite as successful: A barfly cornered Martinez and asked, “Do you know how to make frozen margaritas?”

“Oh, sure, sir, the best,” he answered.

“Well, you’d better speak to your bartender. The ones he’s making are terrible.”

As it turned out, the barman was so overwhelmed by the sheer volume of margarita orders that he was tossing ingredients into the blender without measuring them. Tired of slicing limes, he threatened to quit and return to his former job at a Steak and Ale, where the most complicated cocktail was a bourbon and Coke. “I saw my dream evaporating,” Martinez says. “I thought, ‘My restaurant will go bust and I’ve screwed up Dad’s formula.’”

The next morning while making a pit stop at a 7-Eleven, Martinez had a eureka moment: “For better consistency, I’d premix margaritas in a Slurpee machine. All the bartender had to do was open the spigot.” But 7-Eleven’s parent company refused to sell him the contraption. “Besides,” Martinez was told, “everyone knows alcohol won’t freeze.”

Instead of wasting away in Margaritaville, he bought a secondhand soft-serve ice cream machine and tinkered with Dad’s recipe. Diluting the solution with water made the booze taste too weak, but adding sugar produced a uniform slush. Martinez had struck gold. “Cuervo Gold!” he cracks. The sweet, viscous hooch was such a hit that when Bob Hope performed at SMU in the ’70s, he joked about the margarita he’d just ordered at Mariano’s: “I won’t say how big it was, but the glass they serve it in had a diving board on it. And they salt the edge of the glass with a paint roller.”

Martinez’s original machine cranked out ’ritas for a decade before sputtering to a halt. Though he never received a patent or trademark for the device, it has a place in his heart and, since 2005, in the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. “The credit belongs to heritage and technology,” he says. “The golden ratio was two parts of the past and one of the present.” ♦



Book Club

The Murder of the Tsar

DESPITE A CENTURY OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES TO THE CONTRARY, NO ONE SURVIVED THE 1918 KILLING OF NICHOLAS AND HIS FAMILY. IN *THE RACE TO SAVE THE ROMANOVs*, **HELEN RAPPAPORT** WONDERs: COULD ANYONE HAVE RESCUED THEM FROM THEIR FATE?

By **Anna Diamond**

Why do the Romanovs still fascinate us? This was one of the most extensively photographed families in the world. You only have to look at the pictures of those four lovely sisters in their white dresses to understand why the murder of these innocent children sticks in people’s imaginations. The 100th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1917 passed almost unnoticed in Russia—many now consider the revolution a crime—but I think there will be a mass veneration of the Romanovs on the anniversary of their deaths in July.

Could anyone have saved them? The Germans had the best shot when they negotiated the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Bolsheviks in March 1918. But I don’t think they would have accepted the Germans’ help. The Romanovs thought their place was with the Russian people. It would have been hard for them to leave.

How did the other monarchs in Europe react to the Romanovs’ plight? A lot of their royal relatives were not sympathetic until the children got caught up in this. They felt that the family could have prevented or diffused the situation. The Romanovs were a political hot potato, so for all the monarchs it was “Let’s try and keep out of it. Let’s pass the buck to someone else.”

How would history be different if the family had fled? If they had left Russia, they would have lived in exile and obscurity. The bigger question is, what if there hadn’t been a revolution? If Nicholas had taken the advice he was given he might have been able to initiate reforms before war broke out. Maybe Russia could have become a constitutional monarchy. It would have been a radical move away from the old autocratic system but just imagine a truly democratic Russia with a benign monarch like Queen Elizabeth III!