

Columns & Commentary

In Development: New works at the intersection of art, news and life.



FROM "MIXED" BY DEV DHUNSI, VIA SPH EDITIONS AND MACK

Norway lacks a neutral term for mixed race, and when the artist Dev Dhunsi was growing up, he says, his Indian Norwegian heritage often confounded people. In his book "Mixed," Mr. Dhunsi uses photographs and family belongings to question how identity is constructed. In the image here, he added flags representing his diverse lineage to a traditional Norwegian ring cake. "You're constantly being read," he says, with "people trying to analyze who you are."

Footnotes: Off to the Races



JANIK SOLLNER

Last month at the Japanese Grand Prix, the Formula 1 driver Oliver Bearman had to swerve his car and crash it off-track to avoid hitting another driver. This accident prompted calls for FIA, Formula 1's governing body, to reassess its safety regulations. Those vehicles racing at 200 miles per hour are custom-built to F1 specifications, and they can cost over \$100 million. The fan base is growing: F1's total audience is now 1.8 billion, according to Nielsen Sports, and the league is increasingly popular among women and younger people. Here are some things to read, watch and listen to about Formula 1.

LISTEN
'TG1F: An F1 Podcast'

The hosts of this podcast series explore the intersection of pop culture and F1, discussing topics like Keanu Reeves's work on a new documentary about Cadillac's F1 entry, the "F1" feature film at the Oscars and the F1 driver Lewis Hamilton's appearance at the Met Gala.

LISTEN
'Formula 1'

A 2026 episode of the podcast "Acquired" tracks how the British business mogul Bernie Ecclestone, in his 40-year reign at Formula 1, turned the sport from a niche, struggling enterprise into the global business he sold to Liberty Media in 2017 for \$8 billion.

WATCH
'Formula 1: Drive to Survive'

This Netflix docuseries has introduced F1 to new American fans who have flocked to the show for its drama and big personalities. The latest season covers the firing of a manager of Red Bull's team and rookie drivers aspiring to win their first races.

READ
'The Formula'

Once largely a European spectacle, F1 now includes teams from American car-makers and leagues of U.S. fans. In this 2024 book, the authors Joshua Robinson and Jonathan Clegg track how the league went global and has, as they write, "begun to resemble a post-sport sport."

ROSS DOUTHAT

Trump Needs Smarter Sycophants

Kristi Noem is gone. Pam Bondi is out. If there's going to be a fall guy for our ill-starred regime-change operation in Iran, it's likely to be Pete Hegseth, whose prewar overconfidence is being highlighted in hostile leaks from inside the administration, emphasizing how he was "caught off guard" (never a good look!) by the scale and boldness of the Iranian response.

The former secretary of homeland security, the jettisoned attorney general and the embattled secretary of defense have often seemed like President Trump's ideal cabinet officials: selected for television looks and energy, lacking any political constituency apart from Trump himself, serving without qualm as pure conduits of his will. So their struggles offer a lesson for Republicans contemplating service in this administration's 33 (but who's counting?) remaining months: What Trump appears to want and what he actually wants are not exactly the same thing.

The seeming desire of the president is for loyalty, sycophancy and TV-ready swagger. He wants to turn on Fox News and see his top officials performing like reality-show characters in the drama of his administration. He wants to sit in a cabinet meeting and listen to a litany of his accomplishments. He wants the decisions made in the West Wing or at Mar-a-Lago to be simply rubber-stamped in his departmental fiefs.

He wants all that, but at the same time he also wants victory rather than defeat, and he definitely doesn't want embarrassment. His metrics for success are unusual by normal presidential standards: He has a high tolerance for unpopularity, to put it mildly, and a remarkable shamelessness around

Loyalty means nothing to this president if there's blame to be handed out.

corruption. But there is a point at which, even inside his cocoon, Trump senses that things aren't going well for him. And then sycophancy doesn't work, and it doesn't matter if you were acting on his orders; you will be punished for that unsuccessful service just as surely as if you'd tried to thwart his aims.

That's the position Noem found herself in after the immigration enforcement debacle in Minneapolis. The fact that the sweeping crackdown in Tim Walz's state and Ilhan Omar's city was almost certainly what the president wanted earned the former South Dakota governor no political protection after it all went wrong.

It's also the position Bondi found herself in after doing the president's bidding with the Epstein files and various politicized prosecutions. The unpopularity of the former and the courtroom losses of the latter transformed her from sycophant to scapegoat, even though at every step she was expressing Trump's own wishes.

Likewise, when Hegseth reportedly told the president "let's do it" in the run-up to the war, he was merely being an enthusiastic yes man for a bellicose boss. But there's no reward for being a loyalist if Trump's grand plans don't actually work out: In that case, you own the failure, not him.

Contrast this pattern with that of the cabinet officials whose jobs seem reasonably safe, like Scott Bessent and Marco Rubio. They, too, go along with the president in public without complaint or cavil. But then they find ways to manage his preferences, whether in trade policy or Russia-Ukraine diplomacy, such that the results are Trumpy enough to satisfy the boss but aren't a blind expression of his whims. The fact that they have political capital while the pure sycophants flail implies that Trump's revealed preference is for a version of that balance, not the more slavish alternative.

What might a more successful balancing act have looked like for an attorney general, defense secretary or homeland security chief? For all the talk about how Bondi tried to do everything Trump asked, it might be that she didn't need to prosecute a string of the boss's perceived enemies to stay in his good graces; she just needed a clear lawfare victory *somewhere*.

Likewise, Hegseth, if he had the sense God gave a goose, could have tried to steer Trump to a purely military campaign against Iran — bombs and missiles without the strikes that targeted its leaders — satisfying the president's hawkish impulse without putting the Iranian regime's back against the wall.

As for Noem, well, maybe her own self-dealing and limelight thirst would have doomed her anyway, but in a timeline where the Minneapolis operation was condensed to a few theatrical raids rather than a near-occupation of an American city, she might still be starring in homeland security infomercials.

These alternate scenarios are implausible, of course, because they envision hacks and yes women suddenly discovering a different set of capabilities. But if there is to be any improvement at all across the (did I mention this number yet?) 33 months of Trumpism ahead of us, it can only come from officials able to learn something from their failures and give the president a taste of what he wants, at a dose the country and the world find easier to take.