Education, employment, and home ownership have long been considered stepping stones to the middle class. But in *Abandoned Families*, social policy expert Kristin Seefeldt shows how many working families have access only to a separate but unequal set of poor-quality jobs, low-performing schools, and declining housing markets which offer few chances for upward mobility. Through in-depth interviews over a six-year period with women in Detroit, Seefeldt charts the increasing social isolation of many low-income workers, particularly African Americans, and analyzes how economic and residential segregation keep them from achieving the American Dream of upward mobility.

Seefeldt explores the economic and political obstacles that have altered the pathways for opportunity. She finds that while many low-income individuals work, enroll in higher education, and attempt to use social safety net benefits in times of crisis, they primarily have access to subpar institutions, which often hamper their efforts to get ahead. Many of these workers hold unstable, low-paying service sector jobs that provide few paths for advancement and exacerbate their social isolation. Those who pursue higher education to gain qualifications for better paying jobs often enroll in for-profit schools and online programs that push them into debt but rarely lead to secure employment or even a degree. And while home ownership was once the best way to establish wealth, Seefeldt finds that in declining cities like Detroit, it can saddle low-income owners with underwater mortgages in depopulated neighborhoods. Finally, she shows that the 1996 federal welfare reform and other retrenchments in the social safety net have made it more difficult for struggling families to access public benefits that could alleviate their economic hardships. When benefits are difficult to access, families often take on debt as a way of managing. Taken together, these factors contribute to what Seefeldt calls the “social abandonment” of vulnerable families.

*Abandoned Families* is a timely, on-the-ground assessment of hardship in contemporary America. Seefeldt exposes the shortcomings of the institutions that once fostered upward mobility and shows how sweeping policy measures—including new labor protections, expansion of the social safety net, increased regulation of for-profit colleges, and reparations—could help lift up those who have fallen behind.

**Kristin Seefeldt** is assistant professor of social work at the University of Michigan.
The convergence of tough-on-crime politics, stiffer sentencing laws, and jurisdictional expansion in the 1970s and 1980s increased the powers of federal prosecutors in unprecedented ways. In *Hard Bargains*, social psychologist Mona Lynch investigates the increased power of these prosecutors in our age of mass incarceration. Lynch documents how prosecutors use punitive federal drug laws to coerce guilty pleas and obtain long prison sentences for defendants—particularly those who are African American—and exposes deep injustices in the federal courts.

As a result of the War on Drugs, the number of drug cases prosecuted each year in federal courts has increased fivefold since 1980. Lynch goes behind the scenes in three federal court districts and finds that federal prosecutors have considerable discretion in adjudicating these cases. Federal drug laws are wielded differently in each district, but with such force to overwhelm defendants’ ability to assert their rights. For drug defendants with prior convictions, the stakes are even higher since prosecutors can file charges that incur lengthy prison sentences—including life in prison without parole. Through extensive field research, Lynch finds that prosecutors frequently use the threat of extremely severe sentences to compel defendants to plead guilty rather than go to trial and risk much harsher punishment. Lynch also shows that the highly discretionary ways in which federal prosecutors work with law enforcement have led to significant racial disparities in federal courts. For instance, most federal charges for crack cocaine offenses are brought against African Americans even though whites are more likely to use crack. In addition, Latinos are increasingly entering the federal system as a result of aggressive immigration crackdowns that also target illicit drugs.

*Hard Bargains* provides an incisive and revealing look at how legal reforms over the last five decades have shifted excessive authority to federal prosecutors, resulting in the erosion of defendants’ rights and extreme sentences for those convicted. Lynch proposes a broad overhaul of the federal criminal justice system to restore the balance of power and retreat from the punitive indulgences of the War on Drugs.
While undocumented immigration is controversial, the general public is largely unfamiliar with the particulars of immigration policy. Given that public opinion on the topic is malleable, to what extent do mass media shape the public debate on immigration? In Framing Immigrants, political scientists Chris Haynes, Jennifer Merolla, and Karthick Ramakrishnan explore how conservative, liberal, and mainstream news outlets frame and discuss undocumented immigrants. Drawing from original voter surveys, they show that how the media frames immigration has significant consequences for public opinion and has implications for the passage of new immigration policies.

The authors analyze media coverage of several key immigration policy issues—including mass deportations, comprehensive immigration reform, and measures focused on immigrant children, such as the DREAM Act—to chart how news sources across the ideological spectrum produce specific “frames” for the immigration debate. In the past few years, liberal and mainstream outlets have tended to frame immigrants lacking legal status as “undocumented” (rather than “illegal”) and to approach the topic of legalization through human-interest stories, often mentioning children. Conservative outlets, on the other hand, tend to discuss legalization using impersonal statistics and invoking the rule of law. Yet, regardless of the media’s ideological positions, the authors’ surveys show that “negative” frames more strongly influence public support for different immigration policies than do positive frames. For instance, survey participants who were exposed to language portraying immigrants as law-breakers seeking “amnesty” tended to oppose legalization measures. At the same time, support for legalization was higher when participants were exposed to language referring to immigrants living in the United States for a decade or more.

Framing Immigrants shows that despite heated debates on immigration across the political aisle, the general public has yet to form a consistent position on undocumented immigrants. By analyzing how the media influences public opinion, this book provides a valuable resource for immigration advocates, policymakers, and researchers.
Many working families continue to struggle in the aftermath of the Great Recession, the deepest and longest economic downturn since the Great Depression. In *Children of the Great Recession*, a group of leading scholars draw from a unique study of nearly 5,000 economically and ethnically diverse families in twenty cities to analyze the effects of the Great Recession on parents and young children. By exploring the discrepancies in outcomes between these families—particularly between those headed by parents with college degrees and those without—this timely book shows how the most disadvantaged families have continued to suffer as a result of the Great Recession.

Several contributors examine the recession’s impact on the economic well-being of families, including changes to income, poverty levels, and economic insecurity. Irwin Garfinkel and Natasha Pilkauskas find that in cities with high unemployment rates during the recession, incomes for families with a college-educated mother fell by only about 5 percent, whereas families without college degrees experienced income losses three to four times greater. Garfinkel and Pilkauskas also show that the number of non-college-educated families enrolled in federal safety net programs—including Medicaid, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (or food stamps)—grew rapidly in response to the Great Recession.

Other researchers examine how parents’ physical and emotional health, relationship stability, and parenting behavior changed over the course of the recession. Janet Currie and Valentina Duque find that while mothers and fathers across all education groups experienced more health problems as a result of the downturn, health disparities by education widened. Daniel Schneider, Sara McLanahan and Kristin Harknett find decreases in marriage and cohabitation rates among less-educated families, and Ronald Mincy and Elia de la Cruz-Toledo show that as unemployment rates increased, nonresident fathers’ child support payments decreased. William Schneider, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and Jane Waldfogel show that fluctuations in unemployment rates negatively affected parenting quality and child well-being, particularly for families where the mother did not have a four-year college degree.

Although the recession affected most Americans, *Children of the Great Recession* reveals how vulnerable parents and children paid a higher price. The research in this volume suggests that policies that boost college access and reinforce the safety net could help protect disadvantaged families in times of economic crisis.
Over the last fifty years, American women have made considerable social and economic gains. They now make up half of the workforce, enroll in college at higher rates than men, and hold a larger share of the most prestigious jobs and political offices than in the past. Yet, their collective progress has slowed or stalled in other ways, including an enduring gender wage gap and continued underrepresentation in STEM occupations and other fields. In this special issue of *RSF*, edited by Martha J. Bailey and Thomas A. DiPrete, a multidisciplinary group of social scientists explores half a century of women’s changing work and family roles and analyzes the implications of these shifts for gender equality.

The contributors examine trends in women’s participation in the labor market, focusing on how working both shapes and is shaped by women’s roles within their families. Tanya Byker investigates the so-called “opt-out revolution” and finds that, surprisingly, the rate of “opting out” has been constant for the last twenty years even as women’s labor-force participation and pay has increased. Ipshita Pal and Jane Waldfogel show that the “motherhood penalty” is shrinking and may even reversing for mothers who are married, white, or highly educated. And while marriages in which women out-earned their husbands were once more susceptible to divorce, Christine Schwartz and Pilar Gonalons-Pons show that this relationship has essentially disappeared, suggesting that the growing economic advantage of a high-earning wife has facilitated a revolution in traditional gender roles. Despite these gains, Kim Weeden and co-authors show that the growth of jobs requiring more than 50 hours of work per week, which are disproportionately filled by men, has played an increasing role in perpetuating the gender pay gap. Similarly, Katherine Michelmore and Sharon Sassler find that within STEM fields, a gender pay gap persists partly because women are still more likely to work in lower-paid occupations.

The rapid advancement of women in education and the workforce was a distinguishing feature of the twentieth century, even though barriers to opportunities for women still exist. Together, the articles in this issue of *RSF* provide insightful context for these achievements and describe women’s evolving status in society.
The Coleman Report and Educational Inequality Fifty Years Later

Volume 2, Issue 5

KARL ALEXANDER and STEPHEN L. MORGAN, editors

The 1966 *Equality of Educational Opportunity* Report (EEO)—also known as the Coleman Report—is one of the most important education studies of the twentieth century. Commissioned by Congress as part of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the report revealed pervasive school segregation by race, among other inequalities, and began a national dialogue on educational opportunity for minority children. On the fiftieth anniversary of the EEO report, leading scholars revisit its legacy in this special issue of *RSF*, edited by Karl Alexander and Stephen L. Morgan. The contributors examine the report’s methods and conclusions through the lens of social science advances over the past half century, and analyze issues such as school reform, persistent racial segregation, and changing educational standards to provide a thoughtful analysis of barriers to educational opportunity today.

The issue begins with a reassessment of the EEO’s major findings. Karl Alexander analyzes the report’s conclusion that families exert greater influence on children’s school performance than the schools themselves. He finds that family, school, and neighborhood all interact to shape children’s academic development in ways that are not always separable. Other contributors investigate how racial achievement gaps have changed since the report’s release. Sean Reardon finds that disparities in average school poverty rates between white and black students’ schools are the most powerful correlate of achievement gaps. Barbara Schneider and Guan Saw show that while blacks aspire to attend college at greater rates than whites, fewer blacks than whites now attend four-year colleges in part due to lesser access to college preparation activities, such as advanced-level academic courses.

Contributors also evaluate and update the EEO’s proposals to reduce longstanding socioeconomic and racial achievement gaps. Prudence L. Carter argues that effective policies for ending racial disparities must account for inequalities within schools as well as between them. Brian Jacob and coauthors explore whether technological advances since the EEO, including online courses, have the potential to reduce some of the educational inequalities associated with residential segregation. Ruth N. Lopez Turley shows how renewed partnerships between education researchers and policymakers at the local, regional, and national levels can improve disadvantaged students’ educational outcomes and increase racial and economic integration. By looking forward as well as back, this issue of *RSF* documents what educators and scholars have learned from fifty years of social science research on educational opportunity.
It is widely acknowledged that over the last several decades wealth has become more concentrated at the very top. Less appreciated is the fact that wealth inequality is increasing across all households: extremely wealthy households are pulling away from the top, top households are pulling away from the middle, and middle households are pulling away from the bottom. This development has far-reaching implications for nearly all aspects of the economic and social lives of Americans. In this issue of RSF, edited by Fabian T. Pfeffer and Robert F. Schoeni, leading social scientists investigate the causes of wealth inequality and explore its consequences for social mobility, racial equity, education, marriage, and family well-being.

Several contributors investigate the growing chasm in wealth between the rich and the middle class. Edward Wolff attributes much of the recent wealth loss among the middle class to the housing market crash, as housing accounts for a much greater share of their total wealth than it does for the rich. Jonathan Fisher and coauthors show that wealth inequality is far higher than inequality in income and consumption, and argue that because wealth acts as a buffer to income changes, it is perhaps the most relevant measure of economic inequality. Others explore the persistent racial wealth gap. Alexandra Killewald and Brielle Bryan show that the average wealth return on home ownership for African Americans is only a quarter of the return for whites. Bryan Sykes and Michelle Maroto find that the incarceration of a family member is associated with reduced family wealth, exacerbating the racial wealth gap because of racial disparities in incarceration.

Other articles focus on the effects of wealth inequality on families and relationships. Emily Rauscher finds that that parents’ financial support for their children’s education, which has positive effects on children’s educational attainment, is increasingly connected to parental wealth, tightening the link between wealth inequality and inequality of opportunity. And Alicia Eads and Laura Tach find that while greater family wealth is associated with more stable marriages, lack of wealth—particularly in the form of unsecured debt—is associated with marital instability.

As wealth inequality has increased, it is increasingly important to understand its origins and manifold social and economic consequences for current and future generations.
Rapid technological advances since the 1980s have revolutionized data gathering and changed the nature of many day-to-day transactions. Today, nearly every economic and financial transaction is recorded and can be linked to the individuals involved. This proliferation of “big data” makes it possible for economists and political scientists to empirically analyze the spending behavior of far greater numbers of individuals and firms, over much longer periods of time, than ever before. In “Big Data in Political Economy,” edited by Atif Mian and Howard Rosenthal, a group of quantitative researchers explore the possibilities and challenges of this data boom for the social sciences, focusing on how big data can help us gain new insights into such issues as social inequality, political polarization, and the influence of money in politics.

Among other topics, the articles in this issue demonstrate how large-scale data sources can be used to analyze campaign contributions and political participation. Adam Bonica outlines the development of a comprehensive “map” of the American political system that collects, processes, and organizes data on politicians’ campaign finances, policy positions, and voting records, and makes such information available to voters. Drew Dimmery and Andrew Peterson show how web-based data-gathering techniques can augment such a map to include political contributions made by nonprofits, which are often overlooked or not fully transparent. Deniz Igan links campaign contribution data to both policymakers’ voting records and financial institutions’ lending behavior and shows that legislators who were heavily lobbied by institutions engaging in risky lending, such as subprime lenders, were more likely to vote for deregulation. Chris Tausanovitch connects big data on voters’ income and policy preferences to the voting records of their congressional representatives in order to study how effectively the political system represents voters of different income levels. And Sharyn O’Halloran and coauthors discuss how big data can augment traditional observational research by replacing tedious hand coding of volumes of text with automated procedures.

As research in political economy increasingly focuses on the role of money in shaping the outcomes of elections and policymaking, new methods of aggregating and examining financial data have become central. Together, the papers in this volume show how big data provides unprecedented opportunities for social scientists to better understand the links between politics and markets.
A Pound of Flesh
Monetary Sanctions as Punishment for the Poor
ALEXES HARRIS

“A critical and timely book on a great contemporary American injustice: the imposition of legal fines and fees through the criminal courts. Alexes Harris’ pioneering research documents the widespread practice of charging fines and fees to people who have contact with the criminal justice system—including some who are never convicted of a crime. The imposition of fines and fees creates a two-tiered legal system that separates those who have the ability to pay from those who don’t. Through careful fieldwork and revealing interviews, Harris shows how judges and court clerks use fines and fees to punish poor people in unequal and enduring ways. Even small amounts of legal debt can be insurmountable obstacles for people living on the margins. A Pound of Flesh is a revolutionary book that has already made an impact on the national policy conversation.”—Becky Pettit, professor of sociology, The University of Texas at Austin

In A Pound of Flesh, sociologist Alexes Harris analyzes the rise of monetary sanctions in the criminal justice system and shows how they permanently penalize and marginalize the poor. She exposes the damaging effects of a little-understood component of criminal sentencing and shows how it further perpetuates racial and economic inequality.

ALEXES HARRIS is associate professor of sociology at the University of Washington.

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Coming of Age in the Other America
STEFANIE DELUCA, SUSAN CLAMPET-LUNDOQUIST, KATHRYN EDIN

“Tracing the journeys to adulthood of 150 impoverished kids from inner city Baltimore, this powerful book illuminates the importance of both neighborhood and personal identity. These kids are our kids, too, and this book helps us understand their lives more fully.”—Robert D. Putnam, Harvard University

Coming of Age in the Other America presents a sensitive, nuanced account of how a generation of ambitious but underprivileged young Baltimoreans has struggled to succeed. It both challenges long-held myths about inner-city youth and shows how the process of “social reproduction”—where children end up “stuck” in the same place as their parents—is far from inevitable.

STEFANIE DELUCA is associate professor of sociology at Johns Hopkins University.
SUSAN CLAMPET-LUNDOQUIST is associate professor of sociology at Saint Joseph’s University.
KATHRYN EDIN is Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University.

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From High School to College
Gender, Immigrant Generation, and Race-Ethnicity
CHARLES HIRSCHMAN

Today, over 75 percent of high school seniors aspire to graduate from college. However, only one-third of Americans hold a bachelor’s degree, and college graduation rates vary significantly by race/ethnicity and parental socioeconomic status. If most young adults aspire to obtain a college degree, why are these disparities so great? In From High School to College, Charles Hirschman analyzes the period between leaving high school and completing college for nearly 10,000 public and private school students across the Pacific Northwest.

Hirschman finds that although there are few gender, racial, or immigration-related disparities in students’ aspirations to attend and complete college, certain groups succeed at the highest rates. With a growing number of young adults seeking college degrees, understanding the barriers that different students encounter provides vital information for social scientists and educators. From High School to College illustrates how gender, immigration, and ethnicity influence the path to college graduation.

CHARLES HIRSCHMAN is Boeing International Professor in the Department of Sociology and the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy and Governance at the University of Washington.

Engines of Anxiety
Academic Rankings, Reputation, and Accountability
WENDY NELSON ESPELAND and MICHAEL SAUER

“Engines of Anxiety is essential reading for anyone involved in legal education or considering a career in law. In this meticulously researched book, Wendy Espeland and Michael Sauder show how media rankings have profound and harmful effects on how administrators admit students, deans allocate resources, and employers select applicants. The book’s powerful take-away is that, if law school was once an equalizer, offering a gateway to career opportunities and social advancement for people of modest means, today it serves to entrench the wealth inequality and status hierarchy that permeate American society.”—Tanina Rostain, Professor of Law, Georgetown University Law Center

In Engines of Anxiety, sociologists Wendy Espeland and Michael Sauder delve deep into the mechanisms of law school rankings, which have become a top priority within legal education. Based on a wealth of observational data and over two hundred in-depth interviews with law students, university deans, and other administrators, they show how the scramble for high rankings has affected the missions and practices of many law schools and the drive to increase a school’s rankings has negative consequences for students, educators, and administrators.

WENDY NELSON ESPELAND is professor of sociology at Northwestern University.
MICHAEL SAUER is associate professor of sociology at the University of Iowa.
Parents Without Papers
The Progress and Pitfalls of Mexican American Integration
FRANK D. BEAN, SUSAN K. BROWN, and JAMES D. BACHMEIER

“Parents Without Papers offers a sobering account of the injurious consequences of an undocumented status on long-term patterns of immigrant integration, making a unique and significant contribution to immigration scholarship. The authors make a compelling case for the legalization of undocumented immigrants to ensure a better future for the immigrants themselves and for the country as a whole.”—Cecilia Menjívar, Arizona State University

In Parents Without Papers, immigration scholars Frank D. Bean, Susan K. Brown, and James D. Bachmeier examine the extent to which the outsider status of undocumented Mexican immigrants inflicts multiple hardships on their children and grandchildren. An innovative analysis of the transmission of advantage and disadvantage among Mexican Americans, Parents Without Papers presents a powerful case for immigration policy reforms that provide not only realistic levels of legal less-skilled migration but also attainable pathways to legalization.

FRANK D. BEAN is Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Research on International Migration at the University of California, Irvine.
SUSAN K. BROWN is associate professor of sociology at the University of California, Irvine.
JAMES D. BACHMEIER is assistant professor of sociology at Temple University.

Race, Class, and Affirmative Action
SIGAL ALON

“This provocative book based on a rigorous study of current and historical trends in the United States and internationally raises serious questions and challenges for either race or class-based affirmative action policies. Bringing a timely and compelling perspective to the debate, Sigal Alon convincingly demonstrates what the most equitable admission solutions are for today.”—Barbara Schneider, Michigan State University

No issue in American higher education is more contentious than that of race-based affirmative action. In light of the ongoing debate around the topic and recent Supreme Court rulings, affirmative action policy may be facing further changes. As an alternative to race based affirmative action, some analysts suggest affirmative action policies based on class. In Race, Class, and Affirmative Action, sociologist Sigal Alon studies the race-based affirmative action policies in the United States and the class-based affirmative action policies in Israel. Alon moves past political talking points to offer an innovative, evidence-based perspective on the merits and feasibility of different designs of affirmative action.

SIGAL ALON is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Tel-Aviv University.
Unequal City
Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice

CARLA SHEDD

“Unequal City is a revelatory study that shows and tells how inner city young people struggle to acquire a decent education. It powerfully describes the everyday challenges these students face—illuminating how they navigate school and their local communities and the way they confront what too often holds them back. This book should be required reading for anyone who wants to understand the relationship between inequality on urban education.”—Elijah Anderson, Yale University

Chicago has long struggled with racial residential segregation, high rates of poverty, and deepening class stratification, and can be a challenging place for adolescents to grow up. Unequal City examines the ways in which Chicago’s most vulnerable residents navigate their neighborhoods, life opportunities, and encounters with the law. In this pioneering analysis of the intersection of race, place, and opportunity, sociologist and criminal justice expert Carla Shedd illuminates how schools either reinforce or ameliorate the social inequalities that shape the worlds of these adolescents. By amplifying the oft-ignored voices of marginalized adolescents, Unequal City opens a door onto a generation whose perceptions and experiences reflect the growing inequalities in contemporary society.

CARLA SHEDD is assistant professor of sociology and African American studies at Columbia University.

Beyond Obamacare
Life, Death, and Social Policy

JAMES S. HOUSE

“In this beautifully written book, James House provides a carefully reasoned, empirically grounded analysis of why universal health care, though long overdue, is still insufficient to move Americans closer to the health profile enjoyed by citizens of other wealthy nations. Beyond Obamacare is must reading for everyone who wants to see a healthier, more socially just America.”—Sherman A. James, Duke University

Health care spending in the United States today is approaching 20 percent of GDP, yet levels of U.S. population health have been declining for decades relative to other wealthy—and even some developing—nations. How is it possible that the United States, which spends more than any other nation on health care and insurance, now has a population markedly less healthy than those of many other nations? Sociologist and public health expert James S. House analyzes this paradoxical crisis, offering surprising new explanations for how and why the United States has fallen into this trap. Beyond Obamacare looks past partisan debates to show how cost-efficient and effective health policies begin with more comprehensive social policy reforms.

JAMES S. HOUSE is Angus Campbell Distinguished University Professor Emeritus of Survey Research, Public Policy, and Sociology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
The Asian American Achievement Paradox

JENNIFER LEE and MIN ZHOU

"Why do Asian Americans do so well? Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou provide a theoretically rich and empirically based answer to this question that goes beyond easy stereotypes of Tiger Moms and Confucian values. Their nuanced, convincing argument points to the selectivity of immigrants, the nature of the ethnic community and the reception of Asian Americans by others. Drawing from both sociology and psychology, this smart book should change the national understanding of this important group. This clear, intelligent, and sympathetic book should be required reading for all Americans."—Mary C. Waters, Harvard University

The Asian American Achievement Paradox offers a compelling account of the academic achievement of the children of Asian immigrants. Drawing on in-depth interviews with the adult children of Chinese immigrants and Vietnamese refugees and survey data, Lee and Zhou bridge sociology and social psychology to explain how immigration laws, institutions, and culture interact to foster high achievement among certain Asian American groups. An insightful counter to notions of culture based on stereotypes, The Asian American Achievement Paradox offers a deft and nuanced understanding of how and why certain immigrant groups succeed.

JENNIFER LEE is professor of sociology at the University of California, Irvine.

MIN ZHOU is professor of sociology at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and the University of California, Los Angeles.
Private Equity at Work
When Wall Street Manages Main Street

EILEEN APPELBAUM and ROSEMARY BATT

“Private Equity at Work is the first comprehensive examination of private equity—its history, economic performance, and social consequences, especially for employees. The authors cast a gimlet eye on private equity’s business model, whose shortcomings are dissected with razor-sharp analysis. The material is timely and original. It includes detailed case studies as well as proposals to better regulate this invisible but omnipresent industry.”—Sanford M. Jacoby, U.C.L.A.

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