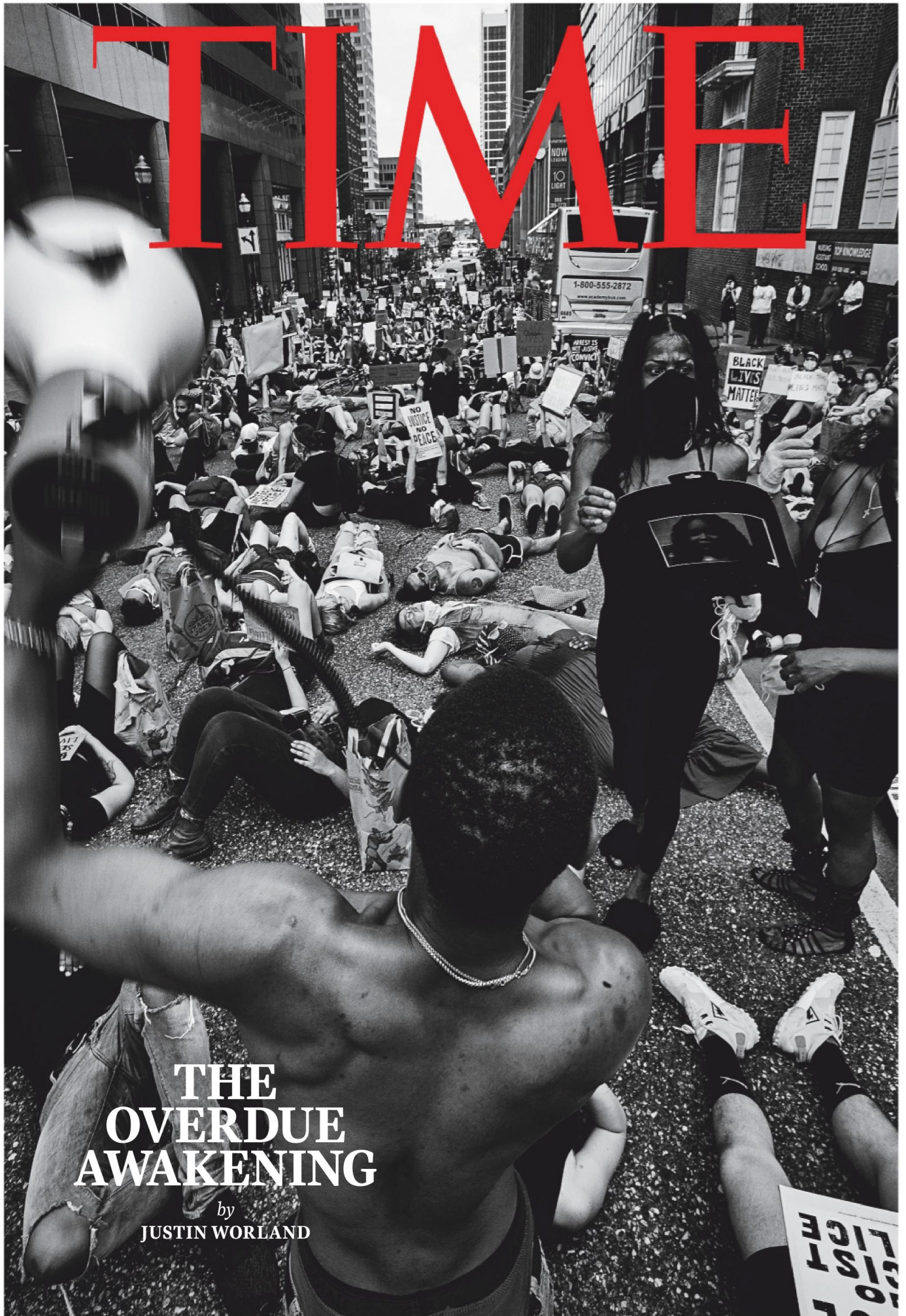


# TIME



## THE OVERDUE AWAKENING

by  
JUSTIN WORLAND

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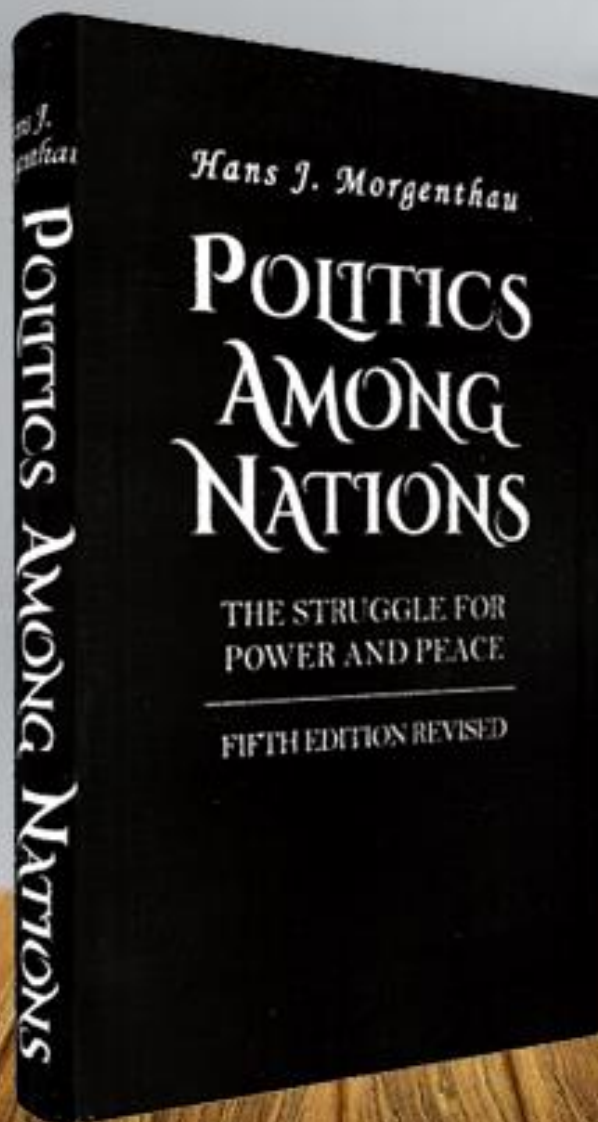
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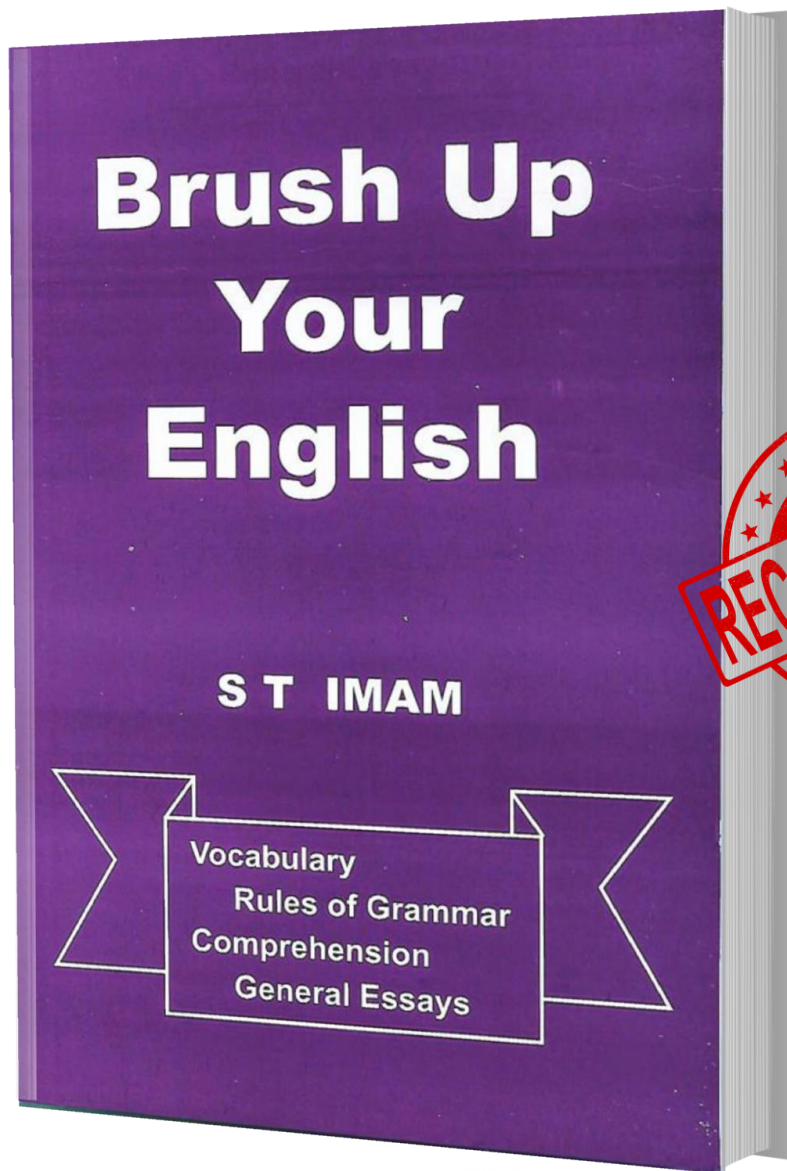


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Nurse Jamwanti Persaud holds the hand of a patient on April 16 at Wyckoff Heights Medical Center in Brooklyn. "It's not right for them to be alone like this," she says

Photograph by Meridith Kohut for TIME

**ON THE COVER:** A protester speaks at a Black Trans Lives Matter rally in Baltimore on June 5

Photograph by Devin Allen



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# From the Editor

## Where we stand

DURING ONE OF OUR RECENT *TIME* 100 TALKS, the singer, actor and activist Andra Day made a point that resonated deeply and echoes words I have heard repeatedly in recent days from colleagues and other people in my life. Being a true advocate of change, a true ally to the Black community, requires “the willingness to be uncomfortable.”

This has been a time of essential discomfort for the U.S.—“a moment of reckoning that has been a long time coming,” as my colleague Justin Worland writes in this issue’s cover story, a searing and personal accounting of American denial about systemic racism. “Politicians, activists and everyday people can and should debate what to do about this reality,” Justin writes, “but it is a reality, one evident in volumes of data, research and reporting, not to mention the lived experience of millions of African Americans.”

The photograph on our cover was taken by Devin Allen at a Black Trans Lives Matter protest on June 5. We first put Devin’s work on the cover five years ago when he was 26 years old, an aspiring professional photographer documenting the protests that broke out in his hometown of Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray in police custody. The image Devin made in 2015 so powerfully evoked scenes of America in 1968 that we used both dates in the headline, a recognition that far too little had changed. Soon after the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and Tony McDade, that 2015 cover began circulating again on social media, with a superimposed third date: 2020.

The issue includes a portfolio from Ruddy Roye, who was with Floyd’s friends and family as they prepared to memorialize him in Houston. And as millions search for ways to support what has become a worldwide movement for equality, *TIME*’s Sanya Mansoor provides guidance on how to help.

We are also publishing one of the most ambitious projects we’ve done on the COVID-19 pandemic. For four weeks, starting in April, correspondent Simon Shuster, photographer Meridith Kohut and a team of videographers, including *TIME*’s Julia Lull, spent nearly every day and many nights at the Wyckoff Heights Medical Center, the site of New York City’s first death from COVID-19. The team, led by senior editor Tina Susman and deputy

director of photography Andrew Katz, documented the crisis from the vantage point of nearly everyone it touched at Wyckoff, and shows in devastating detail its disproportionate impact on Black and brown neighborhoods.

**AT *TIME***, we will always stand for the equality of every person. That is not a partisan or a policy position. It is a basic human value that runs through our coverage. We also recognize that we must hold ourselves accountable for ensuring that it runs through our company. Across countless conversations all over the globe, we are pushing one another on turning discomfort into action. Where do we need to challenge and change existing structures and ways of working? How, as people who are in the business of words, do we get better at naming what we see and doing something about it? We know that amplifying underrepresented voices in our newsroom and increasing the diversity of our teams will make our coverage stronger. We also know that we need to do better, and we will. I am grateful for the trust of our team in pushing us forward with candor and courage.

*TIME* is a 97-year-old institution but only a 19-month-old company, since our acquisition by Marc and Lynne Benioff. As I wrote to you after their purchase of *TIME* in November 2018, the Benioffs have challenged us to think about how to build for the long term. What will *TIME* mean to people decades from now? We are committed to making equality a constant on that journey.

This is the first of a series of double issues this summer, which means you will be getting your issue every two weeks. At a moment when the world confronts multiple crises that are changing so much about the way we live and the ways we need to think about the future, these special issues allow us to explore topics at particular depth. I hope you’ll also visit [TIME.com/newsletters](https://time.com/newsletters) and sign up for one of our 12 newsletters, including The Brief, which delivers the most important stories from *TIME* to your inbox daily.



Edward Felsenthal,  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF & CEO  
@EFELSENTHAL



Allen’s new cover and his photo from 2015, a version of which has recently circulated on social media with the year 2020 added

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# For the Record

**'Like in 1989, we are facing the same brutal regime.'**

**LEE CHEUK-YAN**, chair of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China; thousands of Hong Kongers defied a ban against holding a vigil in remembrance of the June 4, 1989, massacre in Tiananmen Square

*'George's calls for help were ignored. Please listen to the call I'm making to you now.'*

**PHILONISE FLOYD**, brother of George Floyd, asking lawmakers to hold law enforcement accountable, in testimony June 10 before the House Judiciary Committee

# 'ELIMINATION IS NOT A POINT IN TIME; IT IS A SUSTAINED EFFORT.'

**JACINDA ARDERN**, New Zealand Prime Minister, announcing June 8 that the country had eliminated COVID-19 transmission

**'Jair Bolsonaro has put an end to the little seriousness that remained in the way his mockery of a government is dealing with a now out-of-control epidemic.'**

**A JUNE 8 EDITORIAL** in the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, after the nation's health ministry removed cumulative counts of COVID-19 cases and deaths from its website



**1,870 ft.**

Maximum estimated diameter of an asteroid that flew by earth on June 6; luckily the miss wasn't too close: the object passed the planet at about 13 times the distance to the moon

*'I am very sad now. Because of the virus, nobody can be here.'*

**CHARLES SHAY**, WW II veteran, who was the only U.S. D-Day survivor to attend an anniversary event in Colleville-sur-Mer, France, on June 6

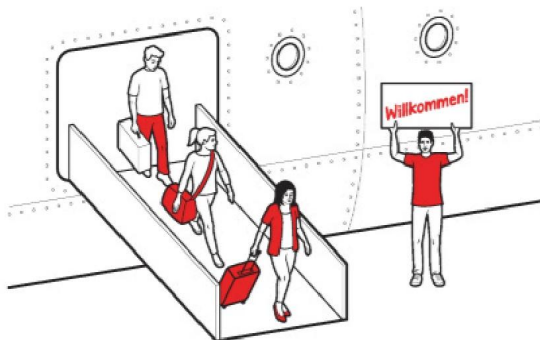


**GOOD NEWS** of the week

**Astronaut Kathy Sullivan, who in 1984 became the first U.S. woman to conduct a space walk, on June 7 also became the first woman to reach the Challenger Deep, the deepest point in the ocean—nearly 7 miles below the surface**

**8**

**Number of passengers who disembarked from the MV Artania cruise ship in Bremerhaven, Germany, on June 8, after a six-month journey around the world; the ship was the last cruise liner in the world still carrying passengers**



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BROWN BIRD DESIGN FOR TIME

# The Brief

**SPREADING  
THE WORD**  
Protesters in  
Paris speak  
out on June 6  
against police  
brutality in the  
U.S. and France



## INSIDE

*AN UNEASY PAUSE AT THE  
CHINA-INDIA BORDER*

*THE SMALL BUSINESSES MISSING  
OUT ON CORONAVIRUS AID*

*UNDERSTANDING COVID-19'S  
ASYMPTOMATIC SPREAD*

# The Brief Opener

WORLD

## The reckoning goes global

By Suyin Haynes/London

**W**HEN LONDON-BASED LAWYER AND women's-rights activist Shola Mos-Shogbamimu first heard the news of George Floyd's killing on May 25, her gut reaction was raw anger. "George Floyd was every black person in that video," she says. "Every one of us can identify with that knee on our necks, not letting up, with that pressure increasing until it suffocates us."

Floyd's final words, "I can't breathe," have been emblazoned on placards and chanted by crowds from Sydney to Cape Town, Paris to Seoul, who have gathered in global solidarity protests since May 30. "We're trying to show that despite being bombed and losing people and then being called terrorists, we still feel empathy. We still feel for people like George Floyd who are being oppressed in other parts of the world," says Syrian artist Aziz Asmar, who painted a mural of Floyd on the remnants of a bombed building in Idlib.

With the coronavirus pandemic laying bare systemic inequalities and racial discrimination, people around the world are seizing the moment to push for change in their own countries. As they stand in solidarity with protesters in the U.S., they're also calling for a reckoning with past and contemporary injustices in Europe and the Pacific region. "Historically it's a different journey," says British community activist Patrick Vernon. "But it's still the same impact: structural racism, stop and search, poverty, exclusion."

**IN SOME COUNTRIES**, common ground with the U.S. is not hard to find. In France, where young Arab and black men are 20 times as likely as white men to be stopped by police, thousands of people have taken to the streets of Paris, Marseille, Lyon and Lille. Many are protesting in the name of Adama Traoré, a 24-year-old Malian-French man who died in police custody in 2016. While police say officers are not responsible for his death, an independent autopsy commissioned by Traoré's family ruled on June 2 that he died of asphyxiation as a result of violent arrest. In Paris, his sister called for justice, telling crowds, "What is happening in the United States has today brought to light what is happening in France." On June 8, as pressure mounted, France announced a ban on choke-hold arrest tactics.

The protests have also struck a chord in Australia and New Zealand, where black and

indigenous communities are protesting the disproportionate levels of policing and violence they face. "We marched to defend Black Lives overseas and to fight for our own lives against our own racist police," campaign group Arms Down NZ told TIME in a statement after marches took place in several cities across New Zealand on June 1. In Australia—where aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners account for 28% of the prison population, despite making up just 3.3% of the total population—tens of thousands marched nationwide on June 6 against racial profiling and police brutality.

Meanwhile, at London protests on June 6 and 7, a chant of "The U.K. is not innocent" took aim at those who claim racism is uniquely bad in the U.S. In Britain, black people are nearly 10 times as likely as their white counterparts to be stopped and searched by police, according to police statistics. "As black and minority people, we're more at risk if we are infected with COVID," said Landa George, who wore a mask as she protested in London's Parliament Square on June 6. "We've got more at stake because we're actually here."

Many activists are hopeful about the current moment, saying it presents an opportunity to address historic inequalities. On June 7, protesters in Bristol, England, pulled down a 125-year-old statue of slave trader and philanthropist Edward Colston and threw it into the city's harbor. In Belgium, statues of King Leopold II, who oversaw the murder of an estimated 10 million Congolese, were vandalized in June. A statue of King Leopold in Antwerp was removed permanently on June 9 after being lit on fire and damaged the previous week. "The protesters were doing an incredible job in calling out King Leopold for what he is: a colonizer and a genocider," says Brussels-based scholar Adeola Aderemi.

At Oxford University, campaigners have been fighting since 2015 to remove a statue of British imperialist Cecil Rhodes from the campus, inspired by the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa. And amid calls to address past injustices, London Mayor Sadiq Khan announced on June 9 a review of the city's landmarks and said that all statues and street names with links to "slavery should be taken down." That same day, a statue of slave trader Robert Milligan was removed from its plinth in London's West India Docks to "recognize the wishes of the community," said the U.K.'s Canal and River Trust.

"There's really an opportunity for everyone to critically reflect on a racist and racialized past," the organizers of Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford said in an interview. Now, with BLACK LIVES MATTER protest placards lying where Colston's statue once stood in Bristol, that reckoning with the past is meeting the urgency of the present. —*With reporting by* JOSEPH HINCKS/ISTANBUL, *and* MÉLISSA GODIN *and* BILLY PERRIGO/LONDON

**'It is an uncomfortable truth that our nation and city owes a large part of its wealth to its role in the slave trade.'**

**SADIQ KHAN,**  
mayor of London





**CATASTROPHIC CURRENT** More than a week after 21,000 tons of diesel fuel spilled into the Ambarnaya river from a heat and power plant, containment operations continued on June 6 in the Siberian city of Norilsk. Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a state of emergency to help support the effort, but conservation groups warn that such an incident could still take years to clean up and could have a devastating effect on the delicate Arctic environment.

#### THE BULLETIN

## In border standoff, India and China try to keep the peace

**GENERALS FROM INDIA AND CHINA MET** high in the Himalayas on June 6 for talks aimed at defusing border tensions between the world's two most populous nations. Each nuclear-armed side has accused the other of provocations along their 2,000-mile disputed frontier. China believes a new Indian road near the border upends the balance of power; Indian hawks say China has moved troops into their territory. In early May, fistfights broke out between soldiers. Weeks on, officials are still trying to stop the scuffles from escalating into a shooting war.

**BLURRED LINES** Although troops from both sides reportedly pulled back in some places on June 9, the situation remains tense. Accurate information is hard to come by, but analysts say there has been a Chinese buildup of military hardware behind the "line of actual control" in some areas, with troops patrolling on the Indian side. A mutual agreement not to use weapons in border clashes appears to have held so far, but observers don't know how long that will last.

**PRIDEFUL** The problem, experts say, is that with strongmen leading both countries, the situation is more volatile than usual. "What you have is essentially two very nationalistic administrations under [Chinese President] Xi and [Indian Prime Minister] Modi," says Steve Tsang, director of the China Institute at SOAS. "I don't think either wants to engage in a military conflict with the other. But neither government wants to be seen as backing down either."

**HOME CROWD** For Modi, the situation is especially tricky. Analysts say an Indian intelligence failure may have allowed the Chinese encroachment, and India is also the underdog both militarily and economically; but Modi has cultivated an image at home as a security-first leader so can't be seen to back down. One possible way to save that reputation: play to Indian disdain for foreign help. President Trump offered to mediate what he called the "raging dispute" on May 27, but so far, that offer hasn't been taken up. —BILLY PERRIGO

#### NEWS TICKER

## North Korea stops talking to South Korea

Pyongyang said June 9 it would **cut off all lines of communication with South Korea** and start treating the nation as an "enemy." Relations between the two have deteriorated since nuclear negotiations with President Trump collapsed in February 2019.

## Election trouble in Georgia

Primary elections in Georgia were marred by **hours-long waits and problems with new voting machines** on June 9, prompting the Georgia secretary of state to open an investigation and summoning echoes of the state's disputed governor's race in 2018. Some of the worst issues occurred in majority African-American areas.

## Iran sentences 'CIA agent' to death

An Iranian blamed for sending the U.S. information about the whereabouts of General Qasem Soleimani, **a powerful figure killed by a U.S. drone strike in January**, was sentenced to death by the Iranian judiciary on June 9. The alleged agent, Seyed Mahmoud Mousavi Majd, was in an Iranian prison at the time of the strike.

## The Brief News

NEWS  
TICKER**Case closed in Swedish PM's assassination**

Swedish officials said June 10 they believe they've identified who **killed the country's Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986**. The suspect, graphic designer Stig Engstrom, died in 2000 in an apparent suicide.

**U.K.'s Prince Andrew not cooperating, DOJ says**

Prince Andrew, a friend of the late sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, **has declined interview requests and sought to "falsely portray himself to the public as eager and willing to cooperate,"** a U.S. federal prosecutor insisted in a statement on June 8. The prince's lawyers earlier said he'd offered to assist the Justice Department three times so far in 2020.

**Feds waive environmental rules**

Citing the economic fallout caused by the coronavirus pandemic, President Trump issued an Executive Order on June 4 directing federal agencies to **set aside environmental-impact requirements** mandated by laws like the National Environmental Policy Act. The change would affect projects such as new pipelines and mines.

## GOOD QUESTION

**Is COVID-19 aid getting to black-owned businesses?**

WHEN THE PAYCHECK PROTECTION Program (PPP) launched in April, it came with promises of equitable relief for U.S. small businesses ravaged by the coronavirus. By June 4, when the employment report showed 2.5 million U.S. jobs added in May, President Donald Trump framed both the program and the report as good news for minorities. "A great day in terms of equality," he said as he prepared to sign legislation easing PPP forgiveness requirements.

In fact, those same figures showed unemployment had grown for African Americans to its highest point in over a decade. African Americans are disproportionately suffering from both COVID-19 and its economic fallout, and the PPP system looks like an extension of the problem. The Small Business Administration, which runs the program, has not released a list of businesses that have received the loans, but data that have emerged through voluntary disclosures and public filings—coupled with interviews with small-business owners and advocates—paint a bleak picture for minority-owned companies.

A June working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that the number of active black small-business owners in the U.S. fell by 41% between February and April—nearly double the national rate. A survey of 500 black- and Hispanic-owned

small businesses conducted in May found that just 12% of them received the full assistance they requested, with two-thirds reporting they did not receive any.

Experts who studied the program contend that its structure rendered this outcome inevitable. Allowing banks to administer the loans, says Ashley Harrington, senior counsel at the nonprofit Center for Responsible Lending, imposed "major structural disadvantages for businesses owned by people of color from the very beginning." Though Congress urged lenders to prioritize businesses owned by women and minorities, banks often prioritized those with whom they had existing relationships. Federal data show that 46% of white-owned businesses accessed credit from a bank in the past five years—double the figure for black-owned companies. So, when applying for a loan, the latter were frequently made to wait.

Policymakers, recognizing these inequities when re-upping PPP dollars, reserved a subset of funding for lenders serving minority and rural communities and passed the bill to loosen forgiveness requirements. But experts are skeptical these measures are enough to combat years of economic inequities. Jessica Fulton, vice president at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a public-policy think tank in Washington, D.C., says the PPP's implementation is yet another reminder of systemic racial inequality. "This is all part of what happens," she says, "when you're not including black communities meaningfully in policy conversations around issues that matter." —ALANA ABRAMSON

## LOST AND FOUND

**Unburied treasure**

On June 7, a decade after he'd hidden a treasure chest in the Rocky Mountains, a New Mexico art collector announced the cache had been found. Here, more recovered riches. —Ciara Nugent

**FORTUNE UNDERFOOT**

A man with a metal detector found **\$4.2 million worth of silver, gold and gems** buried under a farm in Staffordshire, England, in 2009. It's the largest hoard of Anglo-Saxon treasure ever found.

**PALACE PRIZE**

In 2011, workers were renovating a 16th century palace in Kathmandu, once used by Nepalese royalty. In an old storeroom, they came across three large boxes filled with gold and silver ornaments.

**DIVING DISCOVERY**

Divers exploring the harbor of Caesarea on Israel's Mediterranean coast in 2015 found some 2,000 gold coins on the seabed. The 1,000-year-old coins, in a range of currencies, shed light on ancient trade.

# Milestones

## DIED

Champion U.S. gymnast **Kurt Thomas**, on June 5, at 64.

## BAILED OUT

Airline **Cathay Pacific**, by the Hong Kong government, for \$3.5 billion, on June 9, after the pandemic brought travel to a near standstill.

## DELISTED

**Pangolin scales**, from an official index of traditional Chinese medicine. The anteaters are the world's most trafficked mammals and may have hosted a form of the novel coronavirus.

## CANCELED

Long-running reality show **Cops**, by Paramount Network, on June 9, in the wake of protests over the death of George Floyd.

## WARNED

Chinese students, to reassess any plans to study in Australia because of "discrimination," by **China's Ministry of Education**, in a June 9 statement. Australia has called for an investigation into the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in China.

## RESIGNED

New York *Times* editorial page editor **James Bennet**, on June 7, after drawing backlash from *Times* staff over an op-ed by Republican Senator Tom Cotton titled "Send in the Troops."

## BLOCKED

The removal of the **Richmond, Va., statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee**, by a judge's temporary injunction, on June 8, pending a lawsuit hearing.



*Bonnie Pointer, above in 1970, scored hits both with her family group, the Pointer Sisters, and on solo records*

## DIED

### Bonnie Pointer Genre-defying pop star

IT DIDN'T MATTER WHETHER BONNIE POINTER WAS SINGING JAZZ, soul or disco; if she was on the Grand Ole Opry stage or on the set of the film *Car Wash* next to Richard Pryor. Pointer had talent, charisma and ambition that transcended conventional bounds; she was constantly rewriting the limits of her career.

Pointer, who died June 8 at 69, grew up in Oakland, Calif., singing gospel in her father's church alongside her sisters. It was a collaboration that would eventually take them far beyond the congregation. As the Pointer Sisters, they started out by dressing up in 1940s evening gowns to sing jazz licks at breakneck speeds, but their first major hit was the Allen Toussaint-penned "Yes We Can Can," an exuberant slice of funk filled with splashy harmonies and lyrical optimism. In 1974, the group pivoted once again when a song that Bonnie co-wrote, "Fairytale," crossed over into the country market, landing them the Grammy for best country vocal performance by a group. At the Grand Ole Opry, where black women rarely appeared, the group won raucous applause, with Bonnie even performing a tap-dance cadenza.

A few years later, Pointer did it again, launching a solo career that brought her success with disco versions of Motown soul hits, including "Heaven Must Have Sent You." Over the years, she would continue to perform with and without her siblings. Her sister Ruth Pointer, in a memoir, described her as "wild, fierce, and not to be denied." —ANDREW R. CHOW

## BANNED

### Confederate flags, by the U.S. Marine Corps

A FLAG CAN BE A SYMBOL of enormous power, especially in the military—but not every flag's power is positive. On June 5, amid a national reckoning over white supremacy, the U.S. Marine Corps released a detailed memo banning display of the Confederate battle flag. The decree clarifies an April announcement by Marine Commandant General David H. Berger, explaining that the ban extends to displays of the symbol on clothing, mugs, bumper stickers and elsewhere at the service branch's installations. On June 9, the U.S. Navy said it was developing its own ban order.

Removing Confederate imagery may only go so far. About 22% of U.S. service members—and more than half of nonwhite service members—report seeing examples of racism or white nationalism within the military, according to a 2018 *Military Times* poll. The Marines, for their part, seem to acknowledge that fighting racism will take more than banning the Stars and Bars. "Current events are a stark reminder that it is not enough for us to remove symbols that cause division," Berger said in a June 3 statement. "Rather, we also must strive to eliminate division itself."

—ALEJANDRO  
DE LA GARZA



# TheBrief Health

## The risks of COVID-19's asymptomatic spread

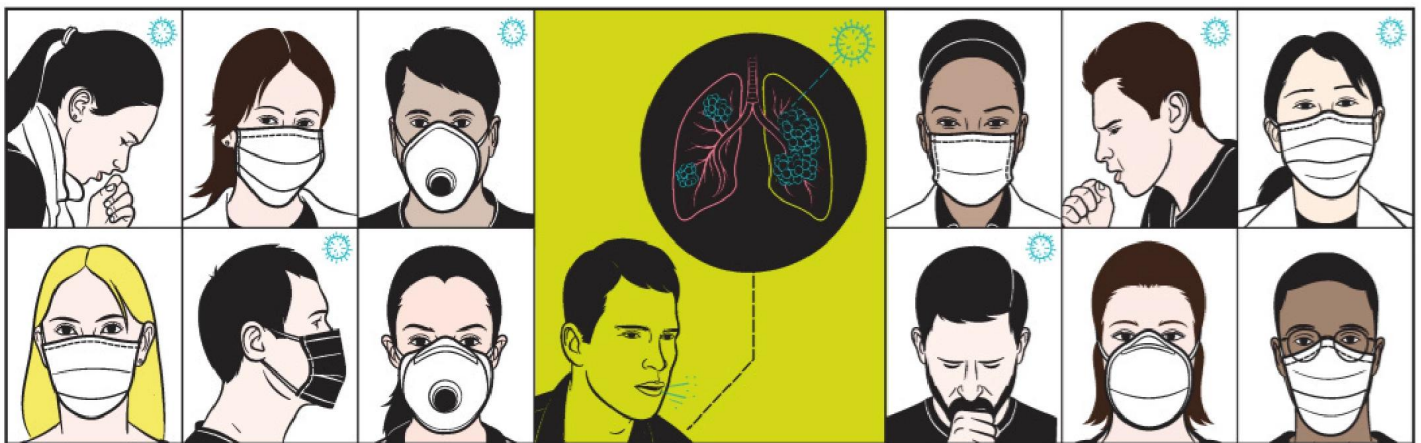
By Alice Park

ONE OF THE MORE INSIDIOUS HABITS OF THE NEW coronavirus behind COVID-19 is its tendency to settle into unsuspecting hosts who never show signs of being sick but are able to spread the virus to others. A new study out of Scripps Research Translational Institute reviewed data from COVID-19 patients around the world and found that up to 40% to 45% of coronavirus cases can likely be traced to people who spread the virus without ever knowing they were infected.

“The range of what can happen with SARS-CoV-2 is from no symptoms to [death],” says Dr. Eric Topol, director and founder of the institute and one of the

There are even hints that the virus may be causing silent damage. In one of the 16 cohorts included in the study, among 331 passengers on the cruise ship *Diamond Princess*, which docked in Japan in February, who tested positive but did not have symptoms, 76 people had CT scans of their lungs and nearly half showed signs of lung-tissue damage typical of coronavirus infection.

And there are other critical questions that experts can't answer about what it means to be asymptomatic. Are people infected but not showing symptoms because their immune systems are better at controlling the virus, or because the virus they harbor is less potent? Or are these people asymptomatic because they have immunity to other, less virulent coronaviruses that are responsible for the common cold and so might already have a level of protection against the pandemic virus as well?



authors of the paper. “That’s not at all similar to any virus or pathogen we’ve experienced that has killing potential in the past.”

**IN THE REVIEW** of the data, only a small fraction of people who were asymptomatic when they tested positive the first time went on to develop symptoms. That means they were not simply presymptomatic—or tested positive but eventually developed symptoms—but truly asymptomatic. Combined with previous studies showing that levels of virus in people who are asymptomatic can be similar to those among people who develop symptoms, this suggests that while they may not outwardly show any signs of illness, asymptomatic people might still carry a potentially dangerous burden of infectious virus that can keep the pandemic spreading from person to person. Understanding this dynamic is especially critical now, as many in the U.S. surge onto the streets to protest centuries of racism and social injustice.

The findings, Topol says, support “basically the reason why we have to all wear masks—because nobody knows who is an asymptomatic carrier.”

While widespread testing of populations could capture more of these asymptomatic cases, and help public-health officials to educate these people about the need for social distancing and other measures to prevent the spread of the virus, Topol says there’s a need for other options as well. He and his team are exploring changes in heart rate that could be captured on smart-watch apps and fitness bands and might signal possible clusters of new infections.

Such changes may not be useful on an individual level, since they can be attributable to a number of factors including stress and heart disease. However, if, for example, resting heart-rate levels for a specific community rise and remain high for a period of time, that could indicate a possible COVID-19 outbreak and flag individuals and their doctors to increase testing and follow-up care in the community.

“The priorities during a pandemic are absolutely to look after the sick,” Topol says. “But we also shouldn’t miss how important this area of asymptomatic spread is to understand. For every one person who is sick, there are a whole lot of people who have the virus and don’t know it.”

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SPANISH



## The Brief TIME with ...

## Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms took the national stage in one galvanizing moment

By Karl Vick

THEY SAY THAT IN NATIONAL POLITICS, YOU GET only one chance to introduce yourself to the country. For Keisha Lance Bottoms, that moment is kind of a blur. It came on the evening of May 29 as Atlanta, the city she has led since 2018, was convulsed by outrage over the killing of George Floyd 900 miles to the north, in Minneapolis. As demonstrations slid into vandalism in the city, the mayor called a news conference.

“I just went out there, and I spoke my truth,” Bottoms recalls. “And when I was done speaking, you know, I actually couldn’t remember what I had said. I knew what I felt, but I couldn’t remember what I had said. And I just remember thinking this either went really right or it went really wrong.”

It was the former.

“Above everything else, I am a mother,” she began. “I am a mother to four black children in America, one of whom is 18 years old. And when I saw the murder of George Floyd, I hurt like a mother would hurt. And yesterday when I heard there were rumors about violent protests in Atlanta, I did what a mother would do. I called my son, and I said, ‘Where are you?’ I said, ‘I cannot protect you, and black boys shouldn’t be out today.’” The mayor paused. “So, you’re not going to out-concern me and out-care about where we are in America. I wear this each and every day. And I pray over my children each and every day. So what I see happening on the streets of Atlanta is not Atlanta. This is not a protest. This is not in the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. This is chaos. A protest has purpose.”

Bottoms went on for 3½ minutes more and was followed at the microphone by Atlantans making the same point at varying timbres: MLK Jr.’s daughter the Rev. Bernice King and rappers T.I. (“This is Wakanda. This is sacred. It must be protected.”) and Killer Mike, whose own impassioned speech went viral. Yet in a national uprising famously without leaders, it was the mayor who displayed the vulnerability, strength, exasperation and controlled anger that were driving hundreds of thousands into the streets. Not 10 days later, she was being vetted for the position of vice-presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket, which presumptive presidential nominee Joe Biden has said will be filled by a woman and quite possibly a minority.

Bottoms, 50, after winning office by less than a percentage point, has made her mark in the

criminal-justice realm, which is now at the top of the national agenda. Under the leadership of Bottoms, Atlanta has done away with cash bail for minor offenses, ended cooperation with ICE and raised police pay by 30% while striking a blow against mass incarceration. “We cut our corrections budget by almost 60%,” she notes. “We are converting our city jail into a center of equity, health and wellness.”

In the nation’s urgent quest for a new, less confrontational model of public safety, the Minneapolis city council had pledged the day before we spoke by phone to disband its police department. Bottoms was not ready to do that in Atlanta. “I just hope that people take it city by city, department by department, and not get stuck on these one-liner messages, ‘Defund the police.’ Because it’s a lot more complicated than that.”

She spoke of the 2014 murder of her nephew Darius Bottoms, killed by gang members who mistook him for a rival. “We called the police,” she says. “Who made the arrest of the people who murdered my nephew? The police. And these people are now in prison.”

**TALKING PUBLICLY** about family trauma is something Bottoms had to learn. Those who know that her father was the R&B singer Major Lance might remember the crossover hits “The Monkey Time” and “Um, Um, Um, Um, Um, Um.” Her own memories are of the day in 1978 when he was led away in handcuffs; he served three years for cocaine possession and dealing. Bottoms, 8 at the time, recalls the day as “the death of our family.”

“It’s very uncomfortable to wear your scars publicly,” says Bottoms. “But what I saw running for mayor was that it was necessary to show my scars because there was a narrative, at least during the campaign, that somehow I was out of touch and didn’t have any clue as to what it means to struggle.”

Indeed, Bottoms looked sleek and successful. She had a bachelor’s degree in broadcast journalism from Florida A&M and a law degree from Georgia State, and she had been both a magistrate and a city-council member, closely allied with incumbent mayor Kasim Reed. She was married to a corporate executive, and their life appeared as well ordered as the names of their kids: Lincoln, Lennox, Langston and Lance.

“I mean, I take as much responsibility as anyone, because professionally you want people to think you are together,” Bottoms says of the need to weave the story of her family’s setbacks into her campaign. “And it was very difficult, because I used to not be able to even talk about that period in my life without crying. I mean, I had lifelong friends who didn’t know that side because it was this well-kept secret.

### BOTTOMS QUICK FACTS

**Close call**  
Bottoms won by just 832 votes over council member Mary Norwood, who would have been the city’s first white mayor since 1973.

**Handyman**  
Husband Derek Bottoms is a vice president at Home Depot.

**For Biden**  
In endorsing Joe Biden, Bottoms defended his remarks about working with segregationist Senators: “The larger context was that you have to work across the aisle with people you don’t like.”



“But I knew in running for mayor, people had to have a better understanding of who I was and where my heart was. And the other thing I learned: like, the more exhausted I became running, the more authentic. I began to peel back the mask and let people see a deeper side of me.”

She quotes poet Paul Laurence Dunbar: “Why should the world be over-wise/ In counting all our tears and sighs?/ Nay, let them only see us, while/ We wear the mask.” If the original subtext of the poem was race, Bottoms clearly suggests it also applies to politicians—not the kind of admission a politician usually makes. “Well, some of my staff would tell you they work for a politician who hates politics,” Bottoms says.

Yet when I ask about the Obama Administration’s task force on policing, she calls it the “Obama-Biden Administration.” And in the flurry of media appearances since May 29, the mayor has proved a refreshingly effective Biden surrogate. Her advice to President Trump was widely quoted: “He should just stop talking.” A year ago, it was mostly hardcore politicians who took notice

***“The more exhausted I became running, the more authentic. I began to peel back the mask.”***

KEISHA LANCE  
BOTTOMS,  
mayor of Atlanta

when Bottoms endorsed Biden shortly after he had been dressed down in a debate by Senator Kamala Harris. Not anymore. Biden has promised to name a running mate by Aug. 1, and Bottoms has entered a pool of contenders that already included Stacey Abrams, a fellow Georgian. Which may be awkward.

“No, it’s not awkward at all,” Bottoms says. “I think if anything it speaks to just the legacy of Atlanta and how Atlanta has really always been this place where leaders have been built. Especially in the African-American community.”

The city famously had no riots after the 1968 murder of Dr. King. And the recent disturbances did stop, with the onus returning to the cops. On May 31, Bottoms and police chief Erika Shields fired two Atlanta officers for using excessive force on two college students.

What is the country seeing? “What they’re seeing is change,” she says. “The last time we’ve seen this kind of change in this country was over 50 years ago. Not in my lifetime. And so, what I would say is that this is what change looks like in America.” □

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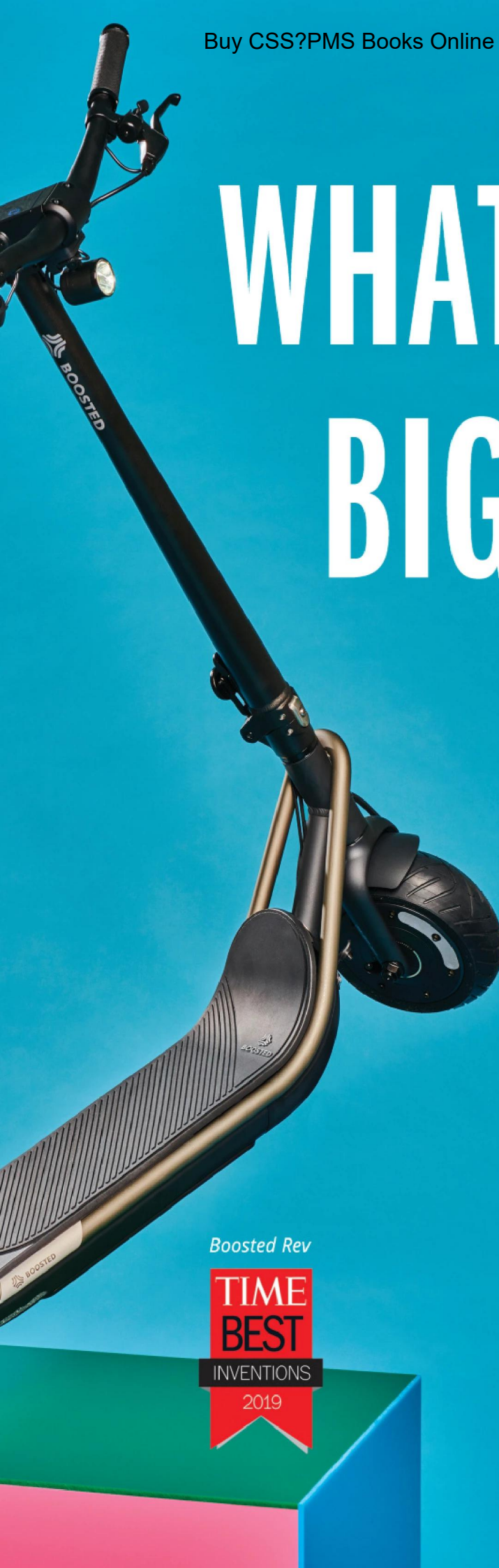
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# The View

HEALTH

## SCIENCE IN A PANDEMIC

By Alice Park

Research is normally a plodding, tedious process. Scientists check and recheck their data; review and re-review their conclusions; then submit their hard work to a scientific journal for publication, where their peers put it through further scrutiny. But a viral pandemic doesn't adhere to a cautious timeline. ▶

INSIDE

BLACK EXCELLENCE IS  
MORE THAN A HASHTAG

PANDEMIC QUESTIONS  
FOR ADVICE COLUMNISTS

THE GLOBE'S BEST  
COVID-19 RESPONSES

# TheView Opener

As COVID-19 has raced across the globe, public-health experts, political officials, doctors and patients scrambled to find answers about the disease. Digital sites that posted manuscripts of scientific papers before peer review have flourished since January, and editors of prestigious medical journals have asked their peer reviewers to complete their analyses, traditionally done over weeks, in just days.

That pressure to publish is exposing the tension between the desire within the scientific community to only release information once it has been fully vetted—a process that takes weeks and months—and the urgent public need for actionable information in the midst of a devastating pandemic. It's not simply an academic matter for those in the research community; increasingly, policymakers have turned to the scientific process to guide their decisions—not to mention the doctors who trust it for finding ways to treat their patients and save lives.

The result is a confusing and often contradictory set of messages from public-health experts. On June 8, a World Health Organization expert declared that COVID-19 spreading from people without any symptoms was “very rare,” then admitted a day later that the conclusion was a “misunderstanding” and based on only a few studies. The concern over asymptomatic spread is a major reason behind social-distancing practices and advice for people to wear face masks in public.

Ever changing public-health advice is the cost of quickly collecting, digesting and making sense of information about a completely new virus. For doctors treating patients with COVID-19, the pressures of managing a pandemic illness are exacerbated by the fact that their North Star for treatment decisions—peer-reviewed reports in medical journals—are also facing steep challenges in finding ways to publish reliable information with far less time than they are accustomed to having.

In early June, for example, scientists from prestigious academic research institutes retracted two papers related to COVID-19, one

involving hydroxychloroquine and another investigating blood-pressure medications, which were both based on data supposedly from patients in hundreds of hospitals on six continents. The scientists decided to pull the papers after the data-collection company they used refused to provide the peer reviewers the full set of data. “Without a doubt in the rush to produce manuscripts for peer review, I am concerned that investigators may be under the same pressure to rush their studies as journals are to publish them,” says Dr. Howard Bauchner, editor in chief of *JAMA*.

In calmer times, prestigious journals such as *JAMA* vet every submission through a team of editors and peer-review experts over several months. During this pandemic, however, the volume of papers has surged, and “there is no way for a traditional peer-review process to keep up with that,” says Jonathan Eisen, professor of evolution and ecology at the University of California, Davis. Rather than wait, scientists are funneling dozens of COVID-19 papers daily to

pre-print servers, or online repositories for scientific manuscripts that have not yet been peer-reviewed. That's raising concerns about the risks of publishing unvetted studies related to patient care. “If there are mistakes in those studies, there is no capacity or limited capacity to correct them,” says Bauchner.

But it may be time to modify the scientific process so it can be more agile at providing experts with critical and reliable information in a timely manner. Encouraging researchers to openly share data used in their studies, for example, would allow more scientists to quickly evaluate the validity of their results. Eisen, who serves on the advisory board of a pre-print database, is also in favor of making the peer-review system more transparent, and boosting the numbers of reviewers by asking graduate students and other qualified people to quickly audit studies. “There is no doubt that [the pandemic] is making it easier for bad players to play badly, but it's also easier for good players to play well,” he says. □



Researchers at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University prepare samples from COVID-19 patients

## SHORT READS

► Highlights from stories on [time.com/ideas](https://time.com/ideas)

### Doing the work

Black and brown people have protested for centuries, writes Savala Trepczynski, executive director of the Center for Social Justice at UC Berkeley School of Law. “**It is white people (especially progressive white people) who are responsible for what happens now.**”

### Playing politics

Former Charlottesville mayor Michael Signer sees parallels between Trump's behavior in 2017 and today. “**Just as in Charlottesville, Trump has seen Minneapolis not as a grieving city to console, but as a chess piece in his battle to figure out the electoral map in his favor,**” he writes.

### Closing the gap

Working moms earn less than working dads, and the numbers are particularly bad for women of color, writes Jennifer Siebel Newsom, first partner of California. “**Identifying and correcting the places where intended or unintended inequalities exist is where we begin to rewrite the status quo.**”

SOCIETY

## Black excellence is an economic lifeline

By George the Poet

THE GEORGE FLOYD PROTESTS IN the U.S. hold deep resonance for Black Britons. We have long struggled to keep our story at the forefront of the national agenda. And as conflicting as it is, the attention and outrage that is felt around Black American injustices is useful for us to explain what we are going through here.

By default, Black people are a political bloc confronted with social and economic disadvantages that show up irrespective of our individual lifestyles. In the U.K., Black men have double the unemployment rate of white men, Black children are four times as likely to be arrested than white children, and Black women are five times as likely to die from complications of pregnancy than white women. And just as Black Americans have a fraction of the wealth of white Americans, 40% of Black households in the U.K. are living in poverty.

This is not a coincidence. What drives our economic conditions is a shared history of exploitation, sabotage and abuse at the hands of white societies. All of that comes rushing back when I see Derek Chauvin's knee on George Floyd's neck.

**THIS MOMENT PRESENTS US** with opportunities. For Black people, our position in the economy is preventing us from building momentum against the effects of racism. Our jobs dictate our time, and that time is currently dispersed in a way that stops us unifying our energy in an organized, sustainable manner. To redesign our freedom strategy and plan an economic route for Black children, we need a strong starting point—one that sensitively acknowledges the past but offers a truly blank canvas for the future.

It's already under way in the arts, where Black people have refined this approach for a century.

**Sporting and artistic excellence can also be seen as the perfect distillation of human potential**

People often bemoan the stereotype of Black public figures falling into the sports and entertainment categories, as if it indicates inferior intelligence. But sporting and artistic excellence can also be seen as the perfect distillation of human potential.

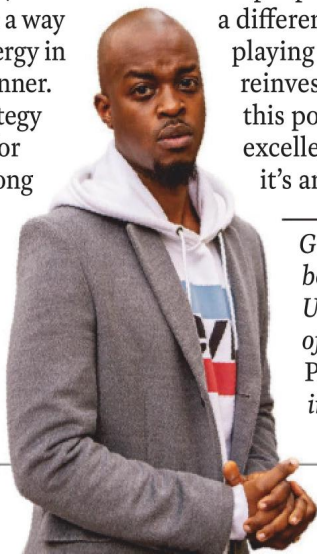
From jazz to ska to hip-hop to grime to Afrobeats, our musical innovations have passionately explained our journey. They give insight into our intellectual brilliance, win over hearts and minds worldwide—and, most important, introduce wealth into communities that were at best overlooked, at worst brutalized by their governments.

I grew up in a neighborhood in north-west London that is 46% Black. (The U.K.'s population is 3% Black.) My mum used music to help me understand what my skin color meant; when I was a child, she played me Bob Marley's "Buffalo Soldier" and used each line to explain the transatlantic slave trade. Over the years, as my consciousness took shape, I listened to more rap music and heard things that aligned with my reality.

To me, no industry has had a greater influence on race politics than entertainment. The unique advantage that we have in the arts is the focus on our story; in this space, our economic activity is tied to the social needs of our community. Do we need more rappers? We need the wealth that rap generates and the discursive space it creates. Do we need more athletes? We need to capitalize on the respect they command, and apply it beyond the sale of products that have nothing to do with our struggle.

Our focus should not be on convincing white people to work and think in a different way; it should be on playing to our strengths. We can reinvest our energy and skills into this political bloc. Black excellence is not just a hashtag: it's an economic lifeline.

*George the Poet is a London-born spoken-word artist of Ugandan heritage and the host of Have You Heard George's Podcast?, an exploration of inner-city life through a mix of storytelling, music and fiction*



ECONOMY

## Truth in numbers

Why are President Trump and markets trumpeting very bad but better than expected jobs numbers as proof that the economic recovery is under way? To some degree, this is a classic case of outperforming low expectations. If your bar is sufficiently low, it is always easier to exceed it. The fact that as many as 40 million people filed for unemployment benefits in the shutdowns was seen as a harbinger for unemployment levels of 25% or more. Make no mistake: it is good that for the moment, employment and the economy overall are not as bad as the worst of our fears.

It would be far worse for all of us if stocks were plummeting, business completely cratering and the financial system melting down. But the disjuncture between how some of us are faring vs. others of us has sharpened divisions that were already there before COVID-19. The employment number is the perfect chrysalis for our present: it shows that we are more resilient than we feared while also exposing that we don't really know what is going on.

—Zachary Karabell



The New York Stock Exchange building reopened for trading



# TheView Society

## Miss Lonelyhearts meets the virus

By Lily Rothman

IN THE WEEKS BEFORE THE CORONAVIRUS RESHAPED THE lives of people around the world, Daniel M. Lavery, who writes the “Dear Prudence” advice column at Slate, received an unusual letter. The writer, in the course of asking for tips for dealing with a husband who kept leaving bits of toenail around the house, admitted to dealing with the problem by putting the toenail bits in his coffee cup.

By the time Lavery answered the question in April, the world had changed—and so had his thinking on the issue. As the increased closeness of shelter-in-place orders amplified existing frustrations, what might that marriage look like? “I think about this letter writer a lot,” Lavery says.

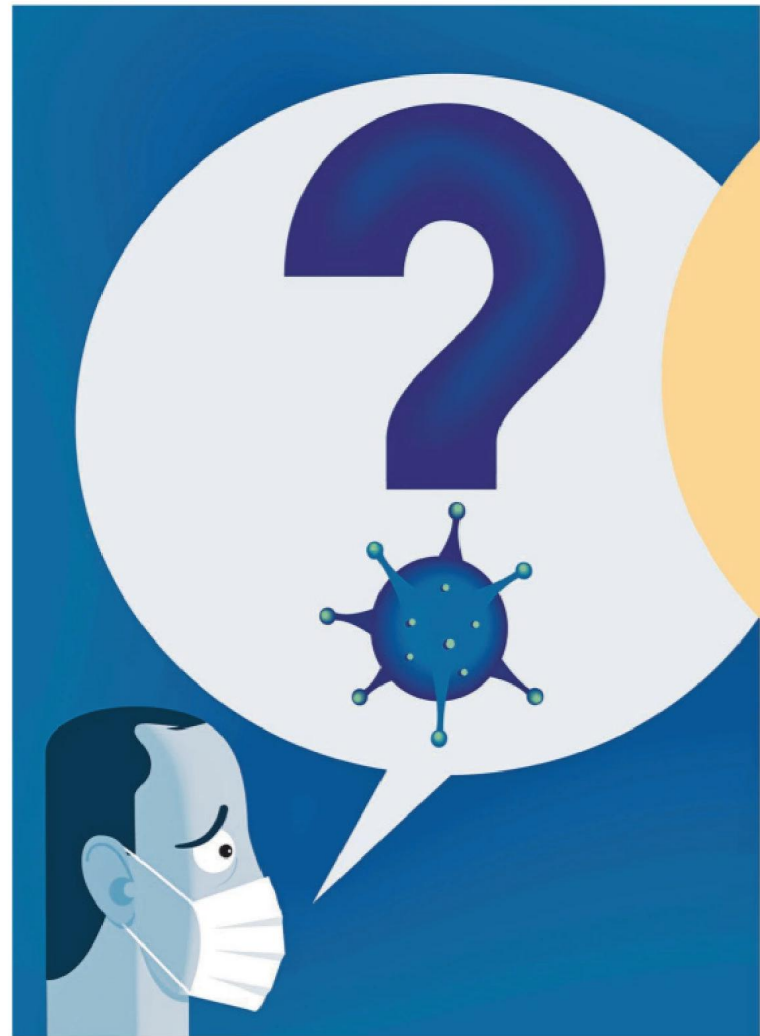
By now, as the world changes once again, questions that address the pandemic directly have been filling his inbox for months. There was the reader looking for adjudication in a dispute with a nurse friend who wanted to break lockdown to visit a romantic prospect. There was the reader whose roommates, who weren’t working or paying rent due to the pandemic, likewise weren’t doing their share of the housework. There was the reader whose boyfriend was even more distant than social distancing demanded.

Lavery is not alone. Advice columnists have found that their mailboxes are a window into the coronavirus’s effects on the interpersonal and emotional lives of people coming to grips with the crisis, and demand for help coping has been high. Carolyn Hax of the *Washington Post* added an occasional second weekly live chat to her schedule to accommodate the volume of letters. Meanwhile, a new pandemic-themed Miss Manners mini e-book, *Miss Manners’ Guide to Contagious Etiquette*, was released on May 19.

For John Paul Brammer, who writes and publishes the “¡Hola Papi!” advice column, the first such letter was about a canceled commencement: “At risk of sounding dramatic, it feels like an important chapter of my life isn’t going to have an ending, that I’ll feel stunted as a result and that the memory of college will wind up tainted . . . Intellectually, I know I need to get to a place of gratitude, and I know that takes time. But how do I move on without feeling like I’m missing experiences that have shaped so many other people?”

Brammer’s advice, on March 17, was to “lean into the strangeness of this occasion”—and while those words still hold up, he looks back at them as a snapshot of a moment before the world knew just how disruptive COVID-19 would be. “That letter was still sort of thinking things were bad, but they weren’t going to be lasting as long,” he says. “I think later, the bigness of the whole thing came into clearer focus.”

By a few weeks into the crisis, social distancing and stay-at-home orders had, unsurprisingly, changed the dynamics about which people tend to need to advice. Brammer saw a shift from letters about romantic loneliness to ones about loneliness in general, and an undercurrent of guilt about needing help with anything personal at a time of global



**It's a whole department of advice now, this finger-pointing.'**

**CAROLYN HAX,**  
Washington Post  
advice columnist

trouble. Lavery says that quandaries involving loud-snacking colleagues disappeared, as questions about disputes with other household members took on a new level of urgency. His colleagues at Slate, which hosts several advice columns, were also hit by isolation-inflected queries, says a spokesperson for the site. The parenting column was suddenly reaching a readership struggling with the division of childcare after schools closed; the sex column was hearing from folks whose intimate lives were hurt by the stress.

Judith Martin, better known as Miss Manners, has been getting letters from people dealing with canceled events, and says she’s noticed a split between those who have found their priorities clarified—realizing a big wedding matters less than actually getting married—and those who, as she puts it, are showing that “greed always comes out,” by wondering how to maximize gifts when a wedding is no longer happening.

Another bucket of queries, however, has been a nice surprise for her: people wondering how best to express

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN W. TOMAC FOR TIME



their gratitude for those helping them through the crisis. “I’m usually deluged with mail from people who don’t see why you have to write thank-you notes or why you have to do anything when people do something for you,” Martin says. “I think it’s occurred to people now, and my mail reflects that, that maybe we should be grateful.”

**ADVICE COLUMNS HAVE** always reflected the concerns of the moment. During the Great Depression, when advice was a particularly popular publishing category, columnist Dorothy Dix observed “a depression in the matrimonial market as well as in the stock market.” (Dix advised young women seeking to beat the matrimonial one not to gamble by compromising their modesty.) A World War II edition of Emily Post’s classic *Etiquette* came with a supplement that advised avoiding waste by serving smaller portions and encouraged women to write letters to their boyfriends overseas. Martin Luther King Jr. actually wrote an advice column for *Ebony* in the late 1950s, taking questions on everything from marriage to

civil rights, and a Vietnam-era letter from a service member to “Dear Abby” sparked a decades-long program through which her readers wrote to troops.

Today, amid the proliferation of online advice columns, everyone is once again facing a society-wide problem. But, says the *Post*’s Hax, it would be a mistake to assume that everyone needs the same advice about the global health crisis. In fact, she says, one of the most noteworthy things about the pandemic is the unevenness of its psychological impacts. One letter will come from someone who feels “full of self-loathing” for being unemployed after attempting a career change right before the pandemic hit; the next will come from a parent “drowning” because her job expects her to work full-time while caring for two young children. Hax advised the former to skip the shame, and the latter to give herself “permission to treat this period of your life as an unholy free-for-all.”

Which is not to say that there aren’t some trends. From the beginning, letter writers have asked about how to deal with people who are not handling things the way they would. Hax heard from one reader who was upset about “young healthy people” using grocery pickup slots that could have gone to shoppers in higher-risk populations, one who blamed a friend for getting sick, one who was “too angry to sleep, to eat, sometimes . . . literally holding my breath” about a sibling who was still going on trips in early April. “It’s a whole department of advice now, this finger-pointing,” she says, adding that she tries to remind the finger-pointers—except in extreme cases—that it’s hard for anyone to perfectly follow medical advice that evolves as quickly as it has been lately.

Slate’s Lavery echoes that idea. Often, he says, such clashes have an underbelly that has little to do with the virus; writers, for example, will mention in passing that they might be considered gentrifiers, before asking if they should call the police about a perceived lack of precautions taken by the neighbors who have lived there for years. Even before George Floyd’s death made law enforcement a more urgent topic than COVID-19, Lavery said the advice he thought everyone needed to hear was, unless your life is in danger, don’t call the cops over disputes with neighbors. Now, he says, he’s even more “securely anchored” to the idea that police are not the way to solve problems, especially the kind about which one might write to an advice columnist.

For him, the last few months have been a reminder that being an advice columnist means more than lending an ear. For every letter writer, there are many readers who absorb the answers—and who, especially in times of crisis, may need to hear some version of the same thing. With no delusions of grandeur about his role, Lavery says he nonetheless sees each response as a chance to shift the way readers think about an issue. “I get maybe one or two paragraphs per question, but it’s at least an opportunity to introduce an idea,” he says. “It’s not a radical source of change, but it’s a public conversation.”

As non-pandemic letters re-enter advice inboxes, that function won’t fade—and, perhaps, neither will the coronavirus’s effect on how the columnists approach their work. Hax, for one, says she can no longer assure her readers, “It’ll be fine.” “I have to take that out,” she says, “and just say, ‘How do we make it better in this moment, given what we have?’” □

## TheView World

## THE RISK REPORT

# Which countries have handled COVID-19 best?

By Ian Bremmer

THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS HAS SHIFTED TO THE AMERICAS, according to the World Health Organization. Now is the time to reflect on which countries handled the initial outbreak response better than others—both as an example for other countries to follow and to gauge which countries are best positioned for what comes next. In that spirit, the team at Eurasia Group developed a methodology to assess key country responses across three areas: health care management, political response and financial-policy response. These are the standouts.

**CANADA**

95,269 cases; 7,717 deaths

The responses of the Canadian and U.S. federal governments to the coronavirus could not be more different. It's hard not to conclude that Canada's universal, publicly funded approach to health care is better suited for handling a global pandemic.

Even in things that are potentially comparable between the U.S. and Canada—say, public-messaging coordination around the virus between national and local governments, or monetary support of international efforts to cooperate on pandemic responses—Canada is faring much better. And a critical component of that has to do with relying on science instead of partisan politics to guide the health care responses. Some academics contend that it was Canada's experience (and, more specifically, its failures) with SARS almost 20 years ago that better prepared it for this current pandemic.

**HOW WE DID IT:** For each category, we developed a rank ordering of effectiveness based on qualitative and quantitative criteria, then allocated countries to quartiles. For the health metric, we looked at mobility and testing performance (scaled by population); for governmental effectiveness, we used our analyst rankings of the authorities' effort, the public reaction, and domestic and international coordination. For economic policies, we scaled the magnitude of the fiscal and monetary effort, relative to the financing gap and starting position, adjusted for our teams' views.

**ARGENTINA**

20,197 cases; 608 deaths

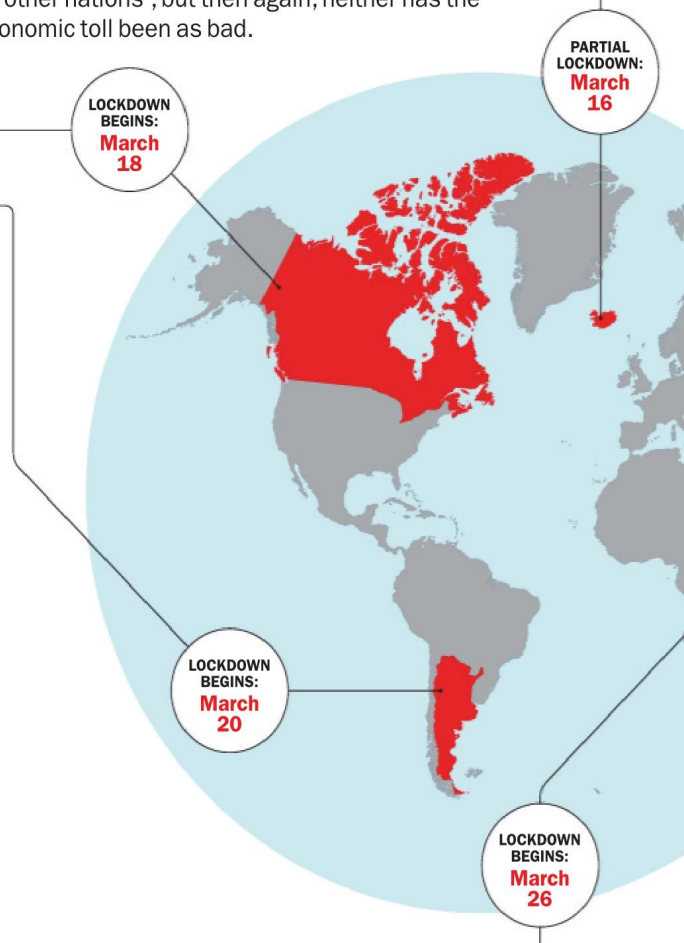
This is the most surprising entry on the list, given that Argentina has triggered its ninth financial default. Argentina registered its first coronavirus fatality on March 7; by the time the government imposed a quarantine on March 20, the world had caught up to the threat of the crisis, and Argentina introduced strict social-distancing measures and its citizens heeded them well. As a result, its numbers look much better than those of most of its neighbors. With the bipartisan cooperation of Argentina's governors, the coronavirus-management response of Alberto Fernández's new administration has led to a boost in approval ratings, which is critical as he fends off international creditors.

Fernández's willingness to spend on domestic stimulus might be there, but the reality of the government's finances and looming debt repayments constrains it considerably.

**ICELAND** | 1,806 cases; 10 deaths

When people talk about the critical importance of testing, Iceland is the clearest example. Following on the heels of its first detected cases in late February, Iceland quickly instituted a broad (and free) testing and contact-tracing regimen to identify and isolate COVID patients, with such good results that it was able to avoid a total shutdown and had a partial reopening by the middle of April. It helps if you're a country of just 364,000 people, but even then Iceland punched above its weight—it had the highest per capita testing rate worldwide.

The initial rounds of government stimulus did not have the same levels of direct new government spending as other nations', but then again, neither has the economic toll been as bad.

**UNITED ARAB EMIRATES** | 37,018 cases; 273 deaths

Making this list is hard; making this list while also taking part in a global oil-price war is even harder, but the United Arab Emirates have managed it. They've done so by adopting stringent social-distancing measures and aggressive disinfection cleaning campaigns, helping to limit total deaths from coronavirus to fewer than 300.

It's helpful that all COVID costs are covered by the government irrespective of insurance status; more questionable is its decision to levy \$5,500 fines on anyone who shares any medical information on social media that doesn't adhere to the government's narrative, a useful tool for limiting conspiracy theories—but also other kinds of speech.

**GREECE** | 2,952 cases; 180 deaths

For a country that was finally showing signs of economic emergence from its decade-long financial crisis, the pandemic could not have hit at a worse time. But there's one major silver lining: a decade of austerity cuts had left Greece with a health-infrastructure system unable to carry the weight of any significant coronavirus outbreak, so Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis saw the writing on the wall and didn't hesitate. Roughly three weeks after Greece recorded its first coronavirus case in late February, the entire nation was in strict lockdown. What few resources the Greek state did have were directed to procuring more ICU beds and health workers. The result? Fewer than 200 COVID-related deaths.

**SOUTH KOREA**

11,668 cases; 273 deaths

South Korea's aggressive early response to the COVID-19 crisis has helped the nation maintain not just a low fatality count but also a low overall case count (around 0.02% of the population) that remains the envy of major industrial democracies. Its continued vigilance, extensive testing and contact tracing, and isolation and treatment of confirmed cases remain a model that most other countries can only aspire to.

South Korea has considerable economic and technological resources at its disposal. Sizable government stimulus—which includes cash payments to most citizens—is helping the country's population ride out the economic turbulence. The result for President Moon Jae-in? Record approval ratings.

**TAIWAN**

443 cases; 7 deaths

Taiwan has managed a truly admirable response in less-than-ideal circumstances, despite being next door to China.

Rather than shuttering its economy for weeks on end in an attempt to slow the virus, the self-governing island went another way—after quickly closing its borders and banning exports of surgical masks, the government used contact tracing and mobile SIM tracking to ensure those in quarantine were actually abiding by the rules. Taiwan has a single-payer health care system. Medical officials held briefings for the public daily, and businesses were kept open with aggressive precautionary measures like taking temperatures and providing sanitizer before patrons could enter.

Taiwan's response ranks among the world's best.

**NEW ZEALAND**

1,504 cases; 22 deaths

When it comes to a global pandemic, it helps to be an island nation tucked away in a far-flung corner of the globe. But New Zealand's rise in the rankings results from so much more than good geographic fortune. Its first case was detected on Feb. 28, and Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern moved swiftly instituting a "Level 4 lockdown," which meant people could interact only with others within their homes in an attempt to "eliminate" the virus altogether. Now the country is COVID-19-free.

Also helping? A promise by the PM that no one would lose their residence if they lost work, a tax-reform package aimed at helping small businesses, and the symbolic yet still appreciated move by Ardern and her Ministers to take a 20% pay cut.

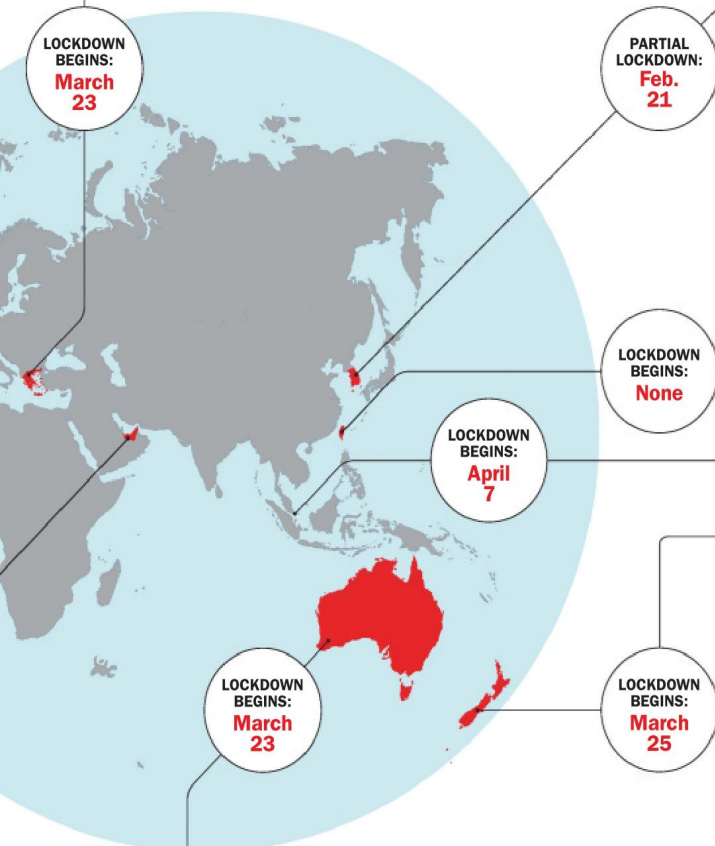
**SINGAPORE**

37,183 cases; 24 deaths

Singapore was among the first countries hailed as a "winner" among national pandemic responses, a well-deserved reputation on the back of its aggressive approach to contact tracing and widespread testing. In retrospect, Singapore was well positioned to outperform others in its response given previous lessons learned from the SARS epidemic, its small size (5.7 million people) and centralized "nanny state" approach. Singapore's response was tarnished by a secondary outbreak centered in overcrowded housing, highlighting the awful living conditions (with as many as 20 people sleeping in the same room) endured by the city's hundreds of thousands of migrant workers. Still, the government's sizable stimulus packages (totaling almost 20% of GDP) are admirable.

**AUSTRALIA** | 7,251 cases; 102 deaths

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has been one of the friendliest world leaders with Donald Trump so far, but the responses of the two could not have been more different. While Morrison shut Australia's borders only a day before the U.S. did, the coordinated response of Australian government officials across the political spectrum, and most critically their deference to scientists, has resulted in some of the best numbers in the world. The economic stimulus the nation launched—worth more than 10% of GDP—going toward subsidizing wages, doubling unemployment benefits and providing free childcare for all helped dramatically too.





*A woman takes a knee as  
George Floyd's funeral  
procession turns into the  
cemetery in Houston on June 9*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
RUDDY ROYE FOR TIME



Essay

# THE OVERDUE AWAKENING

Ending centuries of racism requires systemic change

BY JUSTIN WORLAND

## Essay

### IN LAFAYETTE PARK, JUST STEPS AWAY FROM THE WHITE HOUSE, A WEALTHY HOTELIER RAN A SECOND BUSINESS SELLING ENSLAVED MEN AND WOMEN TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER.

He kept them in a brick cell beside his mansion, and at night an observer recalled hearing “their howls and cries.”

Today in the park there is no plaque, no bench and no monument, to paraphrase Toni Morrison, to memorialize the human lives brutalized there throughout much of the 19th century. After a hard-fought Civil War, the institution of chattel slavery was legally abolished as the U.S. nominally attempted to make racial violence a thing of the past. These days, in the public space situated across from the White House, one is likely to encounter instead an odd mix of office workers on lunch break and MAGA-hat-wearing tourists mingling around the hotelier’s former mansion, known as Decatur House.

Or at least, that was the scene before the past three weeks turned Lafayette Park into a crucible for the fight over the still-present legacy of slavery in America: systemic racism.

Just before 7 p.m. on June 1, a deployment of local, state and federal forces, armored head to toe in riot gear, unleashed rubber bullets and sprayed tear gas onto a crowd of peaceful demonstrators gathered in the park to protest under the mantra “Black Lives Matter.” Moments after the crowd was forcibly dispersed, screaming as their eyes burned from the gas, President Donald Trump strolled out of the White House flanked by senior members of his Administration, triumphantly holding up a Bible so the press could snap a few photos.

Since then, the debate over systemic racism has spread across the nation and around the world. Trump’s Administration has repeatedly denied that discrimination against black Americans is embedded in the political, economic and social structure of the country. Trump believes there are “injustices in society,” his press secretary said, but she brushed aside the notion that antiblackness is intrinsic to U.S. law enforcement. His National Security Adviser, Robert O’Brien, said racist police are just a “few bad apples,” adding, “we need to root them out.” Attorney General William Barr warned against “automatically assuming that the actions of an individual necessarily mean that their organization is rotten.”

But, for all that’s good about America, something is rotten. The protesters in Lafayette Park on June 1 may have been galvanized by the disturbing video of the murder of George Floyd, suffocated to death beneath the knee of a Minneapolis police officer just a week prior. But at the core of their movement is much more than the outrage over the latest instances of police brutality. Centuries of racist policy, both explicit and implicit, have left black Americans in the dust, physically, emotionally and economically. The U.S. may think it has brushed chattel slavery into the dustbin of history after the Civil War, but the country never did a very good job incinerating its traumatic remains, instead leaving embers that still burn today: an education system that fails black Americans, substandard health care



that makes them more vulnerable to death and disease, and an economy that leaves millions without access to a living wage.

Politicians, activists and everyday people can and should debate what to do about this reality, but it is a reality, one evident in volumes of data, research and reporting, not to mention the lived experience of millions of African Americans each and every day. What is helping make this moment historic is that over these past weeks and months, much of the rest of the U.S. appears to have woken up to this truth too.

The crowds of protesters from Seattle to Miami include not just black youth, but a diverse array that looks something like the country itself. In 2015, in the wake of unrest in Ferguson, Mo., just half of Americans said they believed racial discrimination to be a “big problem,” and, in 2016, only a third considered black Americans more likely to suffer from police brutality, according to Monmouth University polling. Today, by contrast, more than 75% of Americans say discrimination is a big problem and 57% understand that African Americans are more likely to suffer from police violence than other demographic groups are, a recent Monmouth poll found.

More broadly, the notion of “systemic racism,” once confined to academic and activist circles on the left of the spectrum, has become the phrase du jour, with Google searches for the term rising a hundredfold in a matter of months and mainstream conservatives like former President George W. Bush joining historically moderate Democrats like Joe Biden in embracing the term to call for a national reckoning.

This spreading recognition highlights an ever starker dividing line in America. On one side, a growing majority of the country



Engwin Williams, 10, awaits the passing of George Floyd's casket in Houston on June 9

guard. Established in the 1930s, Social Security helped ensure a stable old age for most Americans, but it initially excluded domestic and agricultural workers, leaving behind two-thirds of black Americans. Federal mortgage lending programs helped white Americans buy homes after World War II, but black Americans suffered from a shameful catch-22. Federal policy said that the very presence of a black resident in a neighborhood reduced the value of the homes there, effectively prohibiting African-American residents from borrowing money to buy a home. And sentencing laws of the past several decades meant that poor black Americans were thrown in prison for decades-long terms for consuming one type of cocaine while their wealthier white counterparts got a slap on the wrist for consuming another.

There's a straight line between these policies and the state of black America today. The lack of Social Security kept black Americans toiling in old age or forced them to the streets. The obstruction of black homeownership, among other factors, has left African Americans poorer and more economically vulnerable, with the average black household worth \$17,000 in 2016 while the average white household was worth 10 times that. "Tough on crime" sentencing policies have ballooned the black prison population, torn apart families and left millions of children to grow up in single-parent homes.

This systemic discrimination is also a matter of life and death, and police violence, which kills hundreds of African Americans every year, is just the start. Look no further than the coronavirus pandemic. The neighborhoods in which black Americans often find themselves confined by a legacy of discriminatory policy are rife with pollution and, in many cases, lack even basic options for nutritious food. This leaves residents more likely to suffer from health ailments like asthma and diabetes, both of which increase the chances of poor outcomes for those infected with COVID-19.

To actually capture all the ways in which the system is skewed against black people would require tome upon tome. But even a short list feels very long: black women are three to four times as likely as white women to die in childbirth, in part because of a lack of access to quality health care; black children are more likely to attend underresourced schools, thanks to a reliance on local property taxes for funding; black voters are four times as likely as white voters to report difficulties voting or engaging in politics than their white counterparts, in part because of laws that even today are designed to keep them from exercising their basic democratic rights; millions more have been disenfranchised because of felony convictions; hurricane flooding has been shown to hit black neighborhoods disproportionately.

Jeh Johnson, a lawyer who served as Obama's Homeland Security Secretary and was recently tapped to help New York state courts conduct a racial bias review, explained it flatly. "Defined broadly enough, one could say that there's systemic racism across every institution in America," he told CNN recently.

With this in mind, it may come as little surprise that black Americans took to the streets in protest following the murder of George Floyd. Nearly 17% of African Americans are unemployed. When the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a surprise uptick in jobs in May, the unemployment rate for African Americans

is increasingly ready to repudiate its history of structural racism. On the other, many of those in power, especially at the White House, are eager to deny it. This is no surprise. By definition, systemic racism is embedded deep and wide across American society and, therefore, can't easily be rectified. But, for many of those who have spent their lives fighting for racial justice, this is a moment of reckoning that has been a long time coming. "Not everything that is faced can be changed," James Baldwin, the black author and activist wrote in the manuscript of his memoir *Remember This House*, "but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

**THE ORIGINS** of America's unjust racial order lie in the most brutal institution of enslavement that human beings have ever concocted. More than 12 million Africans of all ages, shackled in the bottom of ships, were sold into a lifetime of forced labor defined by nonstop violence and strategic dehumanization, all cataloged methodically in sales receipts and ledgers. Around that "peculiar institution," the thinkers of the time crafted an equally inhumane ideology to justify their brutality, using religious rhetoric in tandem with pseudoscience to rationalize treating humans as chattel. After the Civil War, the arrangements of legal slavery were replaced with those of organized, if not strictly legal, terror. Lynchings, disenfranchisement and indentured servitude all reinforced racial hierarchy from the period of Reconstruction through Jim Crow segregation and on until the movement for civil rights in the middle of the 20th century.

That's the ugly history most Americans know and acknowledge. But systemic racism also found its way, more insidiously, into the institutions many Americans revere and seek to safe-



# Essay

in particular nevertheless remained on the rise. In the U.S., black Americans are dying from COVID-19 at twice the rate of their white counterparts. In some states, the disparity is even sharper.

What's perhaps more surprising is that the rest of America is apparently waking up to these realities. For decades, the truth of systemic racism has always been swept under the rug, lest it make white Americans uncomfortable and hurt the electoral chances of those with the power to address it. In 1968, the Kerner Commission, initiated by President Lyndon Johnson to study unrest in American cities insisted that "white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it." The results of the Commission were largely ignored.

During Barack Obama's first presidential campaign, many Americans were outraged when news broke that the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Obama's pastor, had uttered the words "God damn America" for "killing innocent people," "treating our citizens as less than human" and failing "the vast majority of her citizens of African descent." Obama condemned the comments and reminded the public that, actually, the U.S. had made great progress, even while acknowledging far more was needed.

**TODAY, THE CONVERSATION** is different, and one wonders whether such remarks, as salient now as they were then, would still be met with disavowal. The U.S. cannot deny what is plainly before its eyes. Shocking videos depict George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery murdered in broad daylight. Tens of thousands of black lives have been taken by the coronavirus. And, in the midst of all this, the President fans the flames of racial tensions with dog whistles so unobscure that even the most skeptical can hear them.

In urban centers, black and white protesters have come forward together in defiance, joined by allies like GOP Senator Mitt Romney and longtime Koch Industries executive Mark Holden. In predominantly white cities across the country, white Americans have shown up by the thousands in solidarity. Even small towns in rural parts of the country have joined in the protests.

A lot would need to change to address such deeply rooted bias. The first test may come this year as momentum grows in city halls, statehouses and Washington, D.C., for reforms to root out police brutality, perhaps the most flagrant and visible injustice. "Justice for George is something that many people who were killed through brutality of the police never get," says Benjamin Crump, a civil rights lawyer representing Floyd's family. "And that is a transformative justice, a systematic reform across the board."

Whatever the progress transpires in the coming months, the U.S. still has a long way to go. Last year, I happened to find myself in both Berlin and Charleston, S.C. In Berlin, where Adolf Hitler planned and oversaw the extermination of millions of Jews, it felt as though I couldn't walk a few blocks without a memorial atoning for that sin. In Charleston, I fell asleep on a picturesque beach, only to learn later that the site was a key node in the Atlantic slave trade, where traders imported 40% of enslaved Africans who came to North America. I spent the rest of the day feeling sick to my stomach, disgusted at the possibility that I had enjoyed a leisurely nap where, perhaps, one of my ancestors endured one of the most gruesome of human institutions.

Awakening can be painful. But in America, a reckoning is overdue. □

## SEEKING CHANGE

Photographer **Ruddy Roye** shadowed George Floyd's friends and family before and after the June 9 funeral in Houston, where mourners remembered not just Floyd but all victims of police brutality



*A horse-drawn carriage brought Floyd's body into the cemetery on June 9. "It felt like a state funeral," Roye said. "It felt like they were sending him off with the newfound persona that he had been catapulted into, and this was one of the ways to honor what he became. It felt right."*





People waiting for the public viewing on June 8. “There was an eagerness, an urgency among the crowd, to say goodbye, to pay their respects, to the face of the Black Lives Matter movement against police brutality,” Roye says



The family’s lawyer, Ben Crump, far left; Floyd’s son Quincy Mason, second from right, with his daughter in front of him; and the Rev. Al Sharpton, right, waiting for the private funeral on June 9



*“Justice for George would be that the police officers who tortured him to death be held fully accountable to the full extent of the law,” Crump told Roye on June 7, at a Houston hotel, while waiting for Floyd’s extended family to arrive*

# Nation

## INSIDE THE MOVEMENT TO 'DEFUND THE POLICE'

BY LISSANDRA VILLA

THE GIANT YELLOW LETTERS SPELLING out BLACK LIVES MATTER span two blocks just north of the White House and are visible by satellite. Democratic mayor Muriel Bowser commissioned the mural to send a message to President Donald Trump. But some of the racial-justice protesters who have flooded the streets of the capital wasted no time sending the mayor one of their own. DEFUND THE POLICE, they painted on the pavement just a few feet away.

Since the May 25 killing of George Floyd, protesters have turned that message into a nationwide rallying cry. In New York City, there are growing cries from both activists and officials to cut the police department's \$6 billion annual budget, and Mayor Bill de Blasio has pledged to cut an unspecified amount. In Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti announced up to \$150 million could be redirected from the Los Angeles Police Department to investments in communities of color. And in Minneapolis, where Floyd was killed when a white police officer knelt on his neck for 8 min. 46 sec., a veto-proof majority of the city council pledged to dismantle the troubled police department. It would become the largest city in the nation to take such a step.

Defunding the police means different things to different people. But to most activists, it means slashing funding for police departments and investing it instead in initiatives that benefit underresourced communities, such as after-school programs, housing assistance, substance-addiction support and violence-prevention initiatives. Others call for limiting the roles and responsibilities of police forces. Some advocates want to strip all funding and start from scratch. Among the national groups calling to defund the police are Black Lives Matter, and the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of groups that organized a day of action encouraging supporters to press local officials on the issue.



**THE IDEA OF DEFUNDING** the police has been in activists' playbook for years, but it has taken off amid the national uprising that followed Floyd's death. For years, activists say, the racial-justice movement has worked to pass legislation to reform police behavior, pushing measures like requiring body cameras and restricting the use of force. Yet despite scores of laws enacted within the past decade to address criminal justice, "not much has changed," says Alicia Garza, founder of the Black Futures Lab and one of the women who coined the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. About a thousand people are killed by police every year, according to Mapping Police Violence, and the victims are still disproportionately black.

Unlike federal legislation, which can take years to broker in a divided Congress, calls to defund the police can apply

Protesters add "Defund the police" to a Black Lives Matter mural north of the White House on June 6

immediate pressure on local officials and police departments. In Charlotte, N.C., for example, city council member Braxton Winston announced on June 5 that he would introduce a motion prohibiting future spending on chemical agents used to disperse protesters, while tasking a police-oversight committee to review the department's spending. It was approved just three days later. "There's always been a political ability to make these changes," Winston says. "We may be in a moment where people that are in positions like mine are finally getting the political will."

Critics, including many who favor



police reforms, say dissolving major police departments is a pipe dream that lacks broad public support. “You’re going to have police in New York City because it is needed for safety,” Mayor de Blasio told *TIME* on June 8, “but that doesn’t mean you can’t change policing.” Trump and Republican officials have seized on the rallying cry to accuse Democrats of endangering the public.

But activists say America is witnessing a major shift in how we discuss spending public money to ensure public safety. “People across the country,” says Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of Black Lives Matter and founder of Reform LA Jails, “are ready for a defunding framework.”

**THOSE PUSHING TO DEFUND** police departments also recognize how far they still have to go to convince many Americans,

#### VIEWPOINT

## WHY WE MUST DISBAND THE MINNEAPOLIS POLICE

BY STEVE FLETCHER

When I ran for the Minneapolis city council in 2017, I knew that the police department had a decades-long history of violence and discrimination. I ran on a platform of police reform informed by my experience seeing police harass black canvassers I worked with as a community organizer, and by the police shooting of Jamar Clark in 2015, which prompted weeks of protest. In 2017, the police shooting of Justine Damond further cemented accountability as a central theme of that campaign year.

In my first two years on the council, Minneapolis police officers shot and killed more people, including Thurman Blevins, Travis Jordan, Mario Benjamin and Chiasher Fong Vue, and were caught in a body-cam audit asking EMTs to sedate suspects with ketamine. The Police Officers Federation refused to comply with the mayor’s ban on “warrior training” and took an intentionally divisive onstage role at a Trump rally.

The weight of that history was especially heavy when we learned of George Floyd’s killing. When thousands abandoned social distancing to take to the streets and demand justice, Minneapolis police had an opportunity to distance themselves from Derek Chauvin, to be a calming presence. Instead, they deployed tear gas and rubber bullets. By the next day, it was clear that people on Lake Street were rallying for much more than the prosecution of four officers. They were calling for an end to decades of harassment and racialized violence.

**The lack of change** in Minneapolis hasn’t been for a lack of trying. Many elected leaders before us have tried to achieve meaningful progress, and for the first two years of our current term, so have we. My assessment of what is now necessary is shaped by the failure of the reforms we’ve attempted, in the face of opposition from the department and the Police Federation. We have a talented, thoughtful police chief who, along with past chiefs, has fired officers for significant abuses only to have decisions overturned and those officers reinstated by arbitrators. Mayor Frey has

met fierce resistance from the federation to implement even minor policy changes.

My reform advocacy has prompted intense political attacks from police and their allies. After we cut money from the proposed police budget, I heard from constituents whose 911 calls took forever to get a response, and I heard about officers telling business owners to call their councilman about why it took so long. Since I’ve started talking publicly about this, elected officials from around the country have told me I am not alone in this experience.

Every member of the city council has now expressed the need for dramatic structural change. On June 7, nine of the 13 of us attended a community meeting where we committed to begin the process of dismantling our police department and creating a new, transformative model for public safety in Minneapolis. What I hear from most of my constituents is that they want to make sure we provide for public safety, and that they have learned their whole lives to equate “safety” with “police” but are now concluding that need not be the case.

We’ve already pushed for pilot programs to dispatch county mental-health professionals to mental-health calls and fire department EMTs to opioid-overdose calls, without police officers. We’ve experimented with unarmed, community-oriented street teams on weekend nights downtown to focus on de-escalation. We could turn traffic enforcement over to cameras and, potentially, our parking-enforcement staff, rather than to police.

Mostly, we need to be more deeply engaged with one another. Now our communities need to support each other in resolving conflicts before things escalate dangerously.

We can reimagine what public safety means, what skills we recruit for and what tools we do and do not need. We can play a role in combatting the systems of white supremacy in public safety that the deaths of black and brown people have laid bare. Now is the time for us to put all of these ideas into practice, and we know community members have a lot more. The whole world is watching. We can declare policing as we know it a thing of the past, and create a compassionate, nonviolent future.

*Fletcher is a city-council member for Ward 3 in Minneapolis*

which is why they often use one word: *reimagine*. The idea that police are the only answer to preventing crime and protecting people is ingrained in America and can prevent debate over a different approach. “Police developed this monopoly over the idea of public safety, and so just mentioning anything around defunding police was seen as almost like blasphemy,” says Philip McHarris, a researcher and Ph.D. candidate at Yale whose work focuses on race and policing.

The defund-the-police movement wants to reduce police interactions with citizens. Its proponents advocate shifting funds from police departments to social or health care providers who are better trained to help homeless people or those suffering from substance addiction and mental-health issues. Others want to replace cops in schools and parks with professionals better suited to those environments. Some 14 million students go to schools with a police presence but no counselor, nurse, psychologist or social worker, according to an analysis of 2015–2016 school data by the ACLU.

As Minneapolis reimagines what policing could look like, one place to look is Camden, N.J., a city of 74,000 across the river from Philadelphia. It has had success not through reducing police interactions but by increasing friendly encounters with the community. After years of high crime rates, rising tension between police and residents, and allegations of excessive force, corruption and evidence tampering by officers, Camden’s Democratic mayor and city council voted to dissolve the department in 2012. They replaced it with a larger, cheaper county-wide force, doubling the number of officers thanks in part to money saved by ending generous police-union contracts.

Before officers were rehired, they got psychological testing. They also were trained in de-escalation and community trust building. The larger number of officers, and an emphasis on beat patrols, meant increased regular contact with the community and a focus on residents’ concerns. The city adopted a strict use-of-force policy that requires an officer who witnesses a colleague break it to intervene. The new Camden department also has tougher accountability measures for rogue cops who violate its policies.

Local activists say community relations



with the police still need to improve, but the experiment has worked by most measures. Camden has seen a dramatic drop in violent crime, with homicides decreasing 60% in seven years. Complaints about use of excessive force fell from 65 in 2012 to three last year, according to NPR. And while police in nearby Philadelphia wore riot gear to recent protests, Camden officers joined demonstrators on May 30 in a peaceful march, carrying a banner that read *STANDING IN SOLIDARITY*.

Such successes remain rare, in part because the politics has yet to catch up to the problem: calls for aggressive reform sound radical to many, and activists are still settling on compromise proposals. Few experts believe that abolishing police forces entirely is realistic anytime soon. “No one is in a position to say, ‘Tomorrow we flip a magic switch and there are no police,’” says Alex Vitale, a professor of sociology at Brooklyn College and author of *The End of Policing*. Instead, says Cullors, the Black Lives Matter co-founder,

▲  
New York police officers at a protest in Brooklyn on June 4

“We’re ready to chip away at the line items inside of a police budget ... Police should not be in charge of mental-health crises. They should not be in charge of dealing with homelessness. They should not be in charge of ‘supporting’ people with drug dependency and addiction.”

But at the national level, leaders in both parties are treating the issue as radioactive. The White House has attacked the idea of defunding the police in briefings and on Twitter, with Trump incorrectly painting Biden as a supporter of the policy. Congressional Democrats unveiled legislation on June 8 that would ban choke holds and no-knock warrants in drug cases, and create a national database to track police misconduct. But party officials have distanced themselves from calls to defund the police. “That is a local decision,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said at a press



conference the same day her party's bill was rolled out.

Biden, who is counting on black voters to turn out in November, has also come out against defunding the police. "While I do not believe federal dollars should go to police departments that are violating people's rights or turning to violence as the first resort, I do not support defunding police," Biden said in a June 10 *USA Today* op-ed. "The better answer is to give police departments the resources they need to implement meaningful reforms, and to condition other federal dollars on completing those reforms."

For many on the left, though, the idea has taken flight. On June 6, thousands of protesters marched through Washington from Capitol Hill past the White House, in one of scores of large and sustained demonstrations across the world. Among their chants was "No justice, no peace. Defund the police." —*With reporting by CHARLOTTE ALTER/NEW YORK and VERA BERGENGRUEN/WASHINGTON* □

#### INTERVIEW

### BIAS EXPERT JENNIFER EBERHARDT ON THE KEY TO POLICE REFORM

In her 2019 book, *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do*, Stanford professor Jennifer Eberhardt examines the role that implicit bias—which she defines as "the beliefs and feelings we have about social groups that can influence our decisionmaking and our actions, even when we're not aware of it"—plays in police interactions. With law enforcement reform now in the spotlight, she spoke to TIME about what could make a difference.

**You've worked with several police departments on improving interactions between the police and communities of color. What reforms would you like to see?** A lot of police departments have these implicit-bias trainings. This is a huge business now, where you have consultants who come in. But those trainings aren't evaluated, and so we don't know how effective they are in terms of more equitable policing. We don't actually have data. A lot of the trainings have focused on informing people about bias. But we need to focus on changing the conditions that promote bias rather than simply providing knowledge about bias.

#### **Can you give me an example?**

In Oakland, Calif., we were able to help the police department reduce the number of stops they were making of people who weren't committing any serious crimes. We did this by pushing officers to ask themselves a simple question before each stop they made: Is this stop intelligence-led? Yes or no. What they meant by *intelligence-led* was, Did I have prior information to tie this specific person to a particular crime? Just adding that question to the form that officers complete during a stop slows them down. They're thinking, Why am I considering pulling this person over? So in 2017, Oakland officers made about 32,000 stops across the city. And in 2018, with the addition of that question, they made about 19,000 stops. African-American stops fell by over 43%. And the crime rate didn't go up. Stopping fewer black people did not make the city more dangerous. In fact, the city became safer.

**Has any of what's happened recently made you rethink any recommendations or models that you've been working with?** I guess I appreciate the power of the camera more. Police departments all over the nation have these cameras now, but the vast majority of the footage from police body cameras is not being systematically examined. Oftentimes police departments don't see the footage as data. They see it as evidence in isolated cases. My team wants to have them think about this footage as information that they can use about what's happening daily. In Oakland, we've been looking at traffic stops, because that's the primary way that the average citizen comes into contact with the police. We found officers were professional overall, but they spoke less respectfully to black drivers than to white drivers. At the request of the police department, we came in and developed a training. And now we're looking at the officers' footage, pre- and post-training, to see if that change actually really did make a difference in how they spoke to people in real interactions on the street.

**Do you support calls to defund the police?** I am a believer in police reform. There are lots of things that we could do to bring about change. A call for defunding that is based on the feeling that police are bad and that there's nothing that could be done? No, I don't support that. There's a lot that has been done that people are unaware of. There are a lot of levers that we can move to bring about more equitable policing.

**In your book, you write about studies showing that in heightened situations police made fewer mistakes than civilians. Why?** In these "shoot, don't shoot" studies, police officers as well as community members are faster to shoot black people with guns than white people with guns. But police officers were less likely than normal people to shoot a black person with no gun than they were to shoot a white person with no gun. Researchers found that the more interactive use-of-force training officers had, the less likely they were to show a racial bias in terms of the error rate. If there's intensive training, sometimes you're also decreasing the likelihood that bias can play a role.

—Belinda Luscombe



# Viewpoints

## PROTESTING POLICE BRUTALITY AND RACISM IS ESSENTIAL WORK

BY DR. BROOKE CUNNINGHAM

AS THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE MARCH TO protest police brutality, many worry about the risk of COVID-19 transmission. It's difficult to maintain 6 ft. of separation when the streets fill quickly, it can be tough to call out for change behind a mask, and silent protests feel inadequate when the goal is to finally have one's voice heard. Because of mass gatherings, COVID-19 cases are projected to rise. This is particularly frightening for people living in places, like Minneapolis, where daily cases and deaths are on the rise or flatlining. Unfortunately, the struggle for racial justice has always required people to put their bodies on the line. Protesters are essential workers in a pandemic of police brutality and global racism.

Societies whose norms, social policies and institutions systematically disadvantage people of color relative to white people are, by definition, violent. The World Health Organization defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation." Police in the U.S. have always used violence (or the threat of violence) to maintain the racial order. Many of the country's police departments trace their roots to patrols that returned runaway slaves to involuntary servitude. In addition, interlocking social systems work in concert to produce or reproduce racial inequities, thwart potential and frustrate self-actualization. Consider, for example, the effects of residential segregation on wealth accumulation and in turn school quality.

Oppressed people will resist the "knee on their neck," they will fight to breathe, and they will find allies. Today's protesters are working across his-



↑  
*Protesters, like these in New York City on June 9, are risking their health to improve society's*

torical divisions to create an inclusive, equitable, democratic society in which we are all valued, in which risk and opportunity are not disproportionately distributed by race, in which police do not kill black people with impunity. Protesting is critical, urgent and, unfortunately, risky. Because protesters take risks for our collective well-being, the question then is not, Should people be protesting in a pandemic? Rather, it remains, How can we best protect our essential workers?

That requires providing them with information and tangible resources to mitigate their risk. In addition to ongoing broad educational campaigns about the symptoms of COVID-19 and ways to limit exposure, public-health departments could further educate protesters about strategies routinely employed by other essential workers, such as wearing eye protection; changing clothes ideally before entering the home; and isolating items—such as bags and shoes—that cannot be laundered.

Protesters should consider informing close contacts like household members of their possible exposure to COVID-19 through protest work, particularly if those contacts are elderly adults, are immunocompromised or have other chronic medical conditions.

While many employers rely on essential workers to use their health insurance to cover testing, certainly there are protesters and other essential workers who are uninsured or underinsured. Given that protesters work on the public's behalf, local public-health departments should provide free COVID-19 testing for asymptomatic protesters (and other essential workers). Those who test positive would simply be advised to self-quarantine for 10 days and monitor for symptoms. This could be logistically challenging, but public-health departments could partner with hospitals and clinics that have the rooms required for testing safely, or they could test protesters outside. Health departments should also address legitimate concerns that identifiable information gathered from testing and contact tracing could be handed over to the police in the name of public safety.

PROTEST: TAYFUN GOSKUN—AMADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES; MILLER: JUSTIN EDMONDS/GETTY IMAGES

In addition, the police need to halt behaviors that lead to greater virus spread, such as the use of tear gas, which causes coughing, which in turn widely disperses virus-laden droplets. Police should also limit arrests. There have been numerous reports of police de-masking arrested protesters and placing them in crowded conditions, as in police vans and jail cells. And even more fundamentally, police leadership needs to address the reality that their personnel have been injuring protesters daily and to immediately strengthen policies to curb excessive use of force.

The protests may go on indefinitely. After the police killed Michael Brown in 2014, there were protests in Ferguson, Mo., for over a year. In this case, certain places in Minneapolis—like the corner where George Floyd died, the state capitol and police precincts—may become semipermanent protest sites. There is no reason that a protest site can't also be a mobile health site. Such sites could provide services ranging from free masks, emergency first aid and testing to information about mental-health services (with a focus on coping with the trauma from repeatedly witnessing black men being killed by the police) and ways to access food, medical care and housing—all of which are necessary for optimal health and may be more difficult to access in communities that will need to rebuild because of property damage.

Some protesters will become patients. Their medical care teams will learn that they were at the protests because, as part of routine COVID-19 screening, they will be asked about protest participation. Rather than seeing these protesters as doing the essential work of democracy, some health care workers are certain to judge protesters negatively, as reckless, even as troublemakers. Health care organizations should take steps to counter those narratives and to monitor for disparities in care by exposure route.

We would never blame any other type of essential worker for contracting COVID-19. Let's not start blaming protesters.

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*Cunningham is a general internist, sociologist and assistant professor in the University of Minnesota department of family medicine and community health*

## I AM GEORGE FLOYD

BY VON MILLER

I have real respiratory challenges. I can't count the times I've said, "Momma, I can't breathe." "Daddy, I can't breathe." "Please, help me. I can't breathe." Every time, every single time, someone helped. I cannot even imagine what it would be like to get no help.

Since George Floyd died, tears have overcome me at least once a day. And then, as I thought about it, I have felt this pain in varying degrees for as far back as I can remember—at least since the first time I was called a n-gger in elementary school. The pain sears me every day, now. It's an emotional pain. It's a physical pain. It is the pain of oppression in a country that's supposed to be free.

I have been so blessed. I grew up in the Dallas area in a loving, middle-class home, with my brother and both of our parents. They provided for us, protected us, taught us and loved us, but they couldn't protect us from the ugliness and sheer pervasiveness of racism. It's everywhere and utterly unavoidable.

After the world introduced me to racism while I attended elementary school, I encountered it again from a high school football coach. I had to engage it several times in college—on and off campus. And now, despite living my childhood dream of playing in the NFL,

I continue to experience the constant nightmare of racism. I donated a police vehicle to my hometown in 2016, but when I chose to take a knee for a single game in 2017 during the national anthem to protest racial inequality and police brutality, I received hate mail and lost endorsements.

While it's great that the NFL made an official statement in support of Black Lives Matter and the right to peaceful protest, it will ultimately be up to the team owners to put league policy into action and walk the walk.

I have achieved celebrity, earned great wealth, reached the pinnacle of my profession, and yet, I am George Floyd. I am Ahmaud Arbery. I am Tamir Rice. I am Eric Garner. I am Philando Castile. I am Alton Sterling. I am Oscar Grant. I am Trayvon Martin. I am Emmett Till.

Many of us have seen this day coming, but let's not get it twisted. The social upheaval we are witnessing is not about one horrific incident in Minneapolis. This has been building up for years, decades, generations. We can

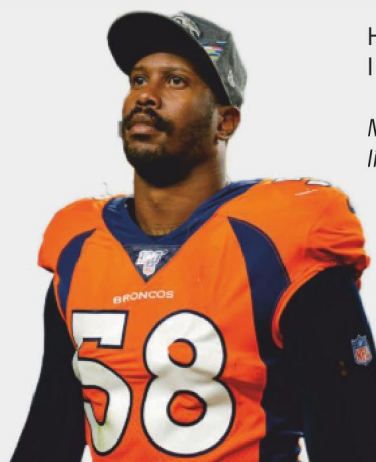
either confront it for what it is and make it an inflection point in the arc of our nation's history, or we can become complicit in the perpetuation of our disease because we refuse to admit we are ill.

This time may be different. I pray that it is different. This time, many of the protesters are not black. This time, the entire country is engaged. This time, the entire world has taken notice. We have really begun to talk with each other, not just at each other. If we can find the strength to come together as a people and fight for healing and change, then together we can enjoy the sunshine of our American ideals. If we do not choose this course, we can expect the darkness to remain.

I am not a football player named Von Miller. I am Von Miller—a strong, proud African American who loves making kids smile, people laugh and my parents shake their heads. I also just happen to play football, which has given me a platform. My love for our country compels me to use it. My message is this: I am all in for unity, equality and justice. If you are committed to that, we can ride together. Let's goooo!

Say their names.  
Hands up. Don't shoot.  
I can't breathe.

*Miller, the Denver Broncos linebacker, is an eight-time Pro Bowler and the Super Bowl 50 MVP*



## FORMER OBAMA ADVISER VALERIE JARRETT ON WHY THESE PROTESTS ARE DIFFERENT

### Have these protests succeeded in shining a light on the systemic issues facing people of color in America?

I'm old enough to remember the civil rights movement in the '60s, and as momentous as it was leading to the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act, never before have I seen protests of this magnitude in all 50 states, involving people of all races, all ages, of all backgrounds. And that is heartening, but protests alone aren't enough.

### What are some of the policy solutions that you'd like to see put forward, and at what level?

When President Obama was in office, he convened a task force on 21st century policing to say, What are the best practices around the country to improve this relationship, this bond of trust between communities of color and law enforcement? Several recommendations are in that report. One that President Obama highlighted [this month]: he asked all local mayors to review with their community over the next 60 days their policies on use of force. We know that when we have policies to de-escalate and the police officers are trained accordingly, we see less violence between police and communities of color. When

President Obama was in office, we stopped giving local law enforcement military equipment that we no longer needed. The sheer presence of that military equipment is deeply offensive and scary to local community residents.

### Do you support the legislation from congressional Democrats to reform police departments?

I think it's absolutely a step in the right direction, and I think that it should be debated in the Senate. We should have hearings. We should have community input. But thanks to the cell cameras, you're beginning to capture on video a problem that we know has been going on for way too long. And I say to the extraordinarily talented members of the law-enforcement community who are out there, who put themselves in harm's way, every single day, that the bad apples are really tainting the overall reputation.

### The Minneapolis city council voted to begin disbanding the city's police department. Do you think that's a good idea?

I think that democracy depends upon having law enforcement. It's one of the ways that we keep our democracy functioning. The question is, Are we really using our law enforcement in a way that is fair and just and that builds this bond of trust? We do need to look at how we can get systemic change and build this bond of trust.

### Do you agree with the advocates who say that Joe Biden bears some responsibility for the tough-on-crime approach of the 1994 crime bill?

I think what is heartening about what we're seeing now is that people are saying, Let's do things differently. I'm sure that there are parts of the crime bill with the advantage of hindsight that Vice President Biden wouldn't support today. In fact, he has said that. We can police more smartly, more efficiently, more in a way that builds trust, and yet reduce the number of people who are actually incarcerated.

—Molly Ball

Watch the full *TIME 100 Talks* interview at [time.com/jarrett-talks](https://time.com/jarrett-talks)



## HOW TO SUPPORT RACIAL JUSTICE

BY SANYA MANSOOR

AS THE NATION REELS FROM THE police killing of George Floyd and reckons with institutional racism and police brutality, many people are left wondering, What can they do?

Hundreds of thousands of protesters have turned out across the country—in both big cities and rural towns—to demand sweeping changes, from police reforms, like mandatory body cameras and implicit-bias training, to defunding the institution and allocating city or state budget funds to community groups.

If you want to show up for the cause but are not able to protest, there are many ways to engage, from educating yourself to spreading awareness and donating money.

### FUND PROGRAMS THAT SUPPORT RACIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

You can donate to Black Lives Matter, which was founded in 2013 after the



◀ A mural honoring George Floyd is painted in Houston's Third Ward, where he was raised

neighborhood-watch volunteer who fatally shot Trayvon Martin was acquitted.

Also consider organizations committed to ending mass incarceration and extreme sentencing, like the Equal Justice Initiative, which provides legal representation to people who have been wrongly convicted, unfairly sentenced or abused in state jails and prisons. Some groups, like the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, focus on helping female inmates and ex-convicts.

Those interested in a grassroots impact can donate to local mutual-aid funds, which work to address systemic inequalities by offering assistance like food and financial help. Many right now are helping those struggling during the coronavirus pandemic, which has disproportionately infected and killed those in the black community.

### DONATE TO HELP PROTESTERS

Bail funds have had a particularly busy two weeks as more than 10,000 protesters have been detained across the U.S., according to a count from the Associated Press. These funds are typically collectives driven by volun-

teers working to raise money to free people incarcerated on bail, as well as to advocate for systemic bail reform.

Many bail funds, like the Minnesota Freedom Fund, have been inundated with donations and now suggest donors redirect their money to other bail funds and organizations in need.

The National Bail Fund Network lists a number of bail funds by state. National organizations include National Bail Out and the Bail Project. Other groups focus on helping specific communities, like the Black Trans Protestors Emergency Fund or the LGBTQ Fund.

### HELP BLACK FAMILIES WHO HAVE LOST LOVED ONES IN KILLINGS

You can directly help grieving black families whose loved ones have been unjustly killed by giving to fundraisers set up to help cover grief counseling, as well as the costs of funerals and legal expenses.

Philonise Floyd has set up a memorial fund for his brother George Floyd. GoFundMe fundraisers are also active for the families of Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot and killed while jogging in a residential area in Georgia in February, and Breonna Taylor, an EMT and aspiring nurse, who was sleeping in her Louisville, Ky., home when a police officer shot and killed her in March.

### FREQUENT BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

Supporting black-owned businesses, especially now, could be crucial to helping them stay operational during the pandemic.

Black-owned businesses often have trouble securing loans. They have also struggled to access federal aid programs designed to alleviate the economic burden for small businesses struggling to stay afloat amid stay-at-home orders.

### VOLUNTEER

If you can't protest or donate and want to help, you can also donate your time

or energy. To help protesters, you could provide childcare or meals or sew masks for those attending rallies.

Consider whether your skills or profession enables you to help. If you have access to a large kitchen, you could consider providing food at a larger scale. If you're a health care professional, you could help as a street medic for protesters—or share resources with them. If you know how to speak a language other than English, you can translate documents and news about protests. If you're a lawyer, consider offering pro bono services.

You can become a legal observer and help document police action during protests. The National Lawyers Guild provides training; check with your local chapter for more information.

If you're thinking of a longer-term commitment, consider mentoring or tutoring at-risk youth.

### EDUCATE YOURSELF AND HAVE UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS

Lasting change won't happen without actively deconstructing our beliefs about race. For many people learning how to be an ally, the best way to start is by educating themselves and listening.

TIME has curated lists of books to read and movies to watch to teach yourself about racism. Suggested literature includes Ta-Nehisi Coates' epistolary *Between the World and Me*, as well as a children's version of Ibram X. Kendi's best-selling *How to Be an Antiracist*, called *Antiracist Baby*.

Documentaries are a good place to start. Ava DuVernay's *13th* walks through the origins of the mass incarceration of black men and its link to the ratification of the 13th Amendment in 1865. *Whose Streets?* dives into the Black Lives Matter uprisings in Ferguson.

Having sometimes uncomfortable conversations about racial justice, police violence and anti-blackness with your own families and communities—even if English isn't their first language—can be helpful. The crowdsourced resource Letters for Black Lives translated a letter into two dozen languages that can be a useful framework to start that discussion. □

# WHO GETS TO SURVIVE IN AMERICA?

*Contagion of fear at the epicenter*

BY SIMON SHUSTER

*The pandemic is proof of a deeper divide*

BY KHIARA M. BRIDGES

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
MERIDITH KOHUT  
FOR TIME





**WHAT'S NECESSARY**

*At the May 5 funeral of Jacqueline Venner, a union representative at Brooklyn's Wyckoff Heights Medical Center who died of COVID-19, Venner's sister Susan McNeil, center, a nurse at Wyckoff, is consoled by colleagues Nakia Brown, left, and Na-Keisha Baxter. A notice on the funeral-home door discouraged hugging, but after conferring the women agreed on one embrace*

# HOW RACIAL HIERARCHY KILLS

BY KHIARA M. BRIDGES

THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS AND THE KNEE THAT Derek Chauvin casually placed on George Floyd's neck for close to nine minutes have shown the exact same thing: there is a racial hierarchy in the U.S., and people of color—particularly black people—are at the bottom of it.

At this point, several months into the pandemic, most people are aware that COVID-19 has disproportionately killed black people in the U.S. In Louisiana, black people account for more than 53% of those who have died from COVID-19, although they make up only 33% of the population in the state. In Cook County, Illinois, they have made up 35% of the county's COVID-19 deaths while constituting 23% of the population. In New York City, which was until recently the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S., preliminary statistics show that the COVID-19 mortality rate for black people was 92.3 per 100,000 people. For white people, however, it was less than half of that: 45.2 per 100,000 people. These numbers make clear that the novel coronavirus is not a great equalizer—posing the same risk to everyone regardless of race. On the contrary, COVID-19 has revealed stark, but wholly familiar, racial inequities in health.

Researchers have long documented that black people have higher rates of heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, lung disease, asthma and obesity, among other illnesses. Importantly, there is nothing innate to black people that explains why they are sicker (and die earlier) than their nonblack counterparts. There is no gene specific to black people that predisposes them to death. As legal scholar Dorothy Roberts cogently explains, "It is implausible that one race of people evolved to have a genetic predisposition to heart failure, hypertension, infant mortality, diabetes and asthma. There is no evolutionary theory that can explain why African ancestry would be genetically prone to practically every major common illness." Black people's genes are not deadly. Rather, the way that we have organized society is deadly.

Neither can racial disparities in health be explained in terms of black people's "culture." Those who seek to justify our racial status quo have proposed that black people have a "culture" that leads them not to exercise, to eschew going to the doctor and to eat diets that are high in sugar, fat and sodium. Racial disparities in health are imagined to be the result of this toxic "culture." This argument

is convincing only to those who want to justify our racial state of affairs. If people of color do not exercise as they should, it is likely because they live in neighborhoods in which exercising outdoors is dangerous and opportunities like gyms or sports leagues are lacking. If people of color do not go to the doctor as often as their white counterparts, it is likely because they do not have health insurance or there are not quality health care providers available to them. If people of color eat foods that are high in sugar, fat and sodium, it is likely because those foods are the only affordable options in their area.

In truth, black people are sicker and die earlier than their white counterparts because they are more likely to encounter those things that we know compromise health—like inaccessible or biased health care providers, inadequate schools and education systems, unemployment, hazardous jobs, unsafe housing, and violent, polluted communities. There are studies upon studies upon studies documenting that the environments in which people of color live, work, play and age are all likely to damage their health. Attempts to explain racial disparities in health in terms of bad genes or bad culture are just excuses not to examine—and dismantle—the structural factors that actually explain why people of color are less healthy.

Notably, many of the illnesses that strike black people at higher rates are the underlying conditions—asthma, hypertension, heart and lung disease, diabetes—that are risk factors for developing a particularly severe case of COVID-19. What this means is that if black people contract the novel coronavirus, they are more likely to die.

Moreover, black people are less able than their white counterparts to engage in the social distancing that makes it possible to avoid contracting COVID-19 in the first place. Low-income people, who are disproportionately people of color, are the "essential workers" who are keeping our cities functioning and our country running. On this point, the Economic Policy Institute issued a report in March that stated that "only 9.2% of workers in the lowest quartile of the wage distribution can telework, compared with 61.5% of workers in the highest quartile." It also noted that "less than 1 in 5 black workers and roughly 1 in 6 Hispanic workers are able to work from home." Low-income people are the janitors. They are the farm laborers. They are stocking the shelves at the grocery stores. They are cooking food in restaurants. (This, of course, is if they were able to keep their jobs, as Hispanic and black Americans were more likely to be laid off or furloughed during the pandemic than white Americans.) Low-income people also cannot social distance because they are less likely to have a car. To go somewhere, they have to take buses. They have to take trains. This also heightens their risk of exposure.

**29.9%**

Percentage of white workers who can work from home

**19.7%**

Percentage of black workers who can work from home

**16.2%**

Percentage of Hispanic workers who can work from home

And what happens if a person gets infected or thinks she might be infected? She is told to quarantine—to stay away from other people. But the housing that low-income people call home does not allow them to do that. It is virtually impossible to avoid contact when you are sharing a bathroom and bedroom with several family members.

So it is not surprising that COVID-19 has been particularly lethal to black people. Their inability to avoid contracting the novel coronavirus—and the increased likelihood of contracting the virus with a body that has already been damaged by structural racism—reveals black people's vulnerability and marginalization.

**GEORGE FLOYD'S DEATH** reveals the exact same thing.

Police brutality against people of color is a spectacular form of the racial violence that our nation's criminal-justice system inflicts every day. If we back up, we will see that the police encounter that led to Floyd's death takes place within a larger context of mass incarceration. Presently, there are 2.3 million people housed in the country's prisons, jails and other criminal-justice facilities. By most measures, this number is remarkable. It means that the U.S. has the largest prison population in the world. China comes in second, imprisoning 1.7 million people—over half a million fewer people than the U.S., in a country of 1.4 billion. The U.S. number translates to the imprisonment of 698 people for every 100,000. This rate dwarfs the incarceration rates of the countries that the U.S. usually thinks of as its peers. Indeed, the rate at which the U.S. incarcerates its population is roughly six times the highest rate of incarceration among Western European nations.

While these numbers, in and of themselves, might be disconcerting, they become even more disturbing when we consider the racial geography of the U.S.'s prison population: people of color, particularly black people, are disproportionately represented among those who are incarcerated. While black people constitute 12% of the U.S. population, they constitute 33% of the prison population. Thus, black people are dramatically overrepresented in the country's prisons and jails. Meanwhile, white people make up 64% of the U.S. population, but they make up just 30% of the prison population.

The extremely high rates of black incarceration mean that, in many communities, it is not unreasonable for black people—particularly black men—to expect to go to jail at some point in their lives. Legal scholar Michelle Alexander observes in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* that in Washington, D.C., "it is estimated that 3 out of 4 young black men (and nearly all those in the poorest neighborhoods) can expect

to serve time in prison." On a national scale, 1 out of 3 black men should expect to be incarcerated during their lifetimes.

Even if the large number of black people presently imprisoned simply reflected the extremely debatable fact that a large number of black people commit crime, we should have a problem with mass incarceration. As legal scholar Paul Butler writes in *Let's Get Free: A Hip-Hop Theory of Justice*, "Imagine a country that has statistics like D.C.'s in which more than one-third of the young male citizens are under the supervision of the criminal justice system: they either are in prison, on probation or parole, or have a trial coming up. Imagine a country in which two-thirds of the young men can anticipate being arrested before they reach age 30. Imagine a country in which there are more young men in prison than in college ... Such a country sounds like a police state. When we criticize those kinds of regimes, we think that the problem lies not with the citizens of the state, but rather with the government or law." Butler suggests that mass incarceration says less about the problematic values held by those who would break the law and more about the problematic commitments of the nation that would incarcerate these lawbreakers with such impunity.

Mass incarceration means that this country approaches its problems through the criminal-justice system. When faced with a social ill, our nation responds by building more prisons and jails. Because incarceration is the tool that we use to address societal problems, we have erected few limitations on the police's ability to keep the social order. Police can stop whomever they want to stop whenever they want to stop them. They can investigate things that have no relation to the reason for the stop. They can use force. They can kill.

Like COVID-19, the criminal-justice system evidences the way a society that should care for and protect its people instead leaves black people susceptible to harm and with little control over their well-being. It does so through the tragically high numbers of black people who are in prisons and jails, in the disproportionate rates of incarceration of black people, in the violence of the tactics that governments have used to police communities of color, in the frequency with which black people's encounters with the police end in death and in the infrequency with which police officers are indicted and convicted for killing black people.

Proof of this country's racial hierarchy is everywhere. May we dismantle it in all its cruel, life-ending forms.

**2.3  
MILLION**

—  
*Number of  
people incarcerated  
in the U.S.*

**33%**

—  
*Percentage of  
the U.S. prison  
population that  
is black*

**12%**

—  
*Percentage of  
the U.S. population  
that is black*

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*Bridges is a professor at UC Berkeley School of Law and the author of Critical Race Theory: A Primer*



COVID-19

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# THE FIGHT OF THEIR LIVES

*One month inside a New York hospital  
as the virus—and fear—took hold*

BY SIMON SHUSTER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
MERIDITH KOHUT  
FOR TIME





**'I COULD NOT  
LEAVE HER  
ALONE.'**

*Dr. Parvez Mir checks on  
Leobardo Herrera, 59,  
hours after taking  
him off a ventilator on  
April 25. Herrera and  
his brother Miguel,  
who lived together,  
were both admitted to  
the Brooklyn hospital.  
Throughout his battle,  
Herrera said he found  
strength in thinking  
of Francisca, his  
wife of 24 years*

**'THE PANDEMIC  
HAS SCARRED US  
PERMANENTLY.'**

*Lidia Herrera says  
goodbye to her  
brother Miguel, 63,  
on May 4 after he was  
disconnected from life  
support. "I understand  
the risk, but I am going  
to take it," Lidia said  
before entering the  
room, wearing protective  
gear provided by the  
photographer. Lidia  
crossed him with their  
late mother's white  
beaded rosary and said,  
"You were a warrior; you  
fought until the end."  
Miguel is one of eight of  
her family members to  
die of the disease*





# D

DR. PARVEZ MIR WAS ALREADY IN BED ON THE night of March 4, about to fall asleep, when his colleagues called to break the news. In Room 10 of the intensive-care unit that Mir has led for more than two decades, they were looking at their first case of COVID-19: an elderly woman, feverish and frail, who had arrived by ambulance with pneumonia in both lungs. In 10 days, she would be the first patient to die of this disease in New York—the first of more than 30,400 in this one state.

Until her diagnosis, the new coronavirus had seemed like an abstract threat to Mir and his staff at Wyckoff Heights Medical Center in Brooklyn. All they knew in early March was what the news had reported—an outbreak in China had spread across Asia and jumped to Europe, killing thousands. Like most U.S. hospitals, Wyckoff had done practically nothing to prepare. Its intensive-care unit had only one room equipped to handle patients with a highly infectious disease. Within a month, it had built out 60 of them around the hospital.

“Now everything that walks into the emergency room is COVID,” Mir tells me on a tour of his ward on April 22, his face protected by a shield fashioned from a welder’s mask.

In the room around us, a dozen patients cling to life on ventilators, their beds cocooned in plastic sheets that are stapled to the ceiling and duct-taped to the walls. From overhead, the loudspeaker issues a call for help—“Respiratory and anesthesia, stat”—that has become the refrain of this pandemic.

Mir has heard it hundreds of times. Wyckoff, with a capacity of around 350 beds, has treated more than 2,000 COVID-19 patients, the vast majority of them Latino and black with poor health insurance or none at all. Almost 300 died. Nearly 200 Wyckoff workers became infected; others could not handle their fear of infection and stopped coming to work. “I don’t think we’ll ever be the same,” Mir says once the loudspeaker goes quiet, leaving only the hisses and beeps of the breathing machines. “We’ve seen so much death, so much chaos, so much catastrophe.”

**THE DISEASE** has now killed more than 111,000 in the U.S. and 407,000 worldwide. New hot spots are erupting from North Carolina to Arizona as states reopen, driven by public and political pressure to revive the economy, even as medical experts warn that a second wave of the disease is all but inevitable. Many





**‘THAT COULD HAVE BEEN ME.’**

*Kevin Negrón, who like nearly a dozen colleagues on the patient-transport team was infected by COVID-19, transports a deceased patient to the morgue on April 20. During his shift, he also moved the body of a colleague who had died. “Let’s do this one right,” Negrón told his team. “He is one of us.”*



**‘I CANNOT GO LIKE THIS.’**

*Jonathan Richards, a check-cashing-store manager, spent a week on a ventilator before coming out of sedation prematurely and pulling out his breathing tube. “I felt like I was drowning,” he said later of his extubation, “like I forgot how to breathe.” On April 25, Richards, 50, receives help sitting up for the first time*

countries have yet to reach their peak of infections.

Starting on April 9, as the pandemic reached its apex in New York City, Wyckoff granted reporters from TIME access to its facilities and staff. Our goal was to gather the fullest possible account of how the outbreak played out within its walls, from its emergency room and makeshift morgues to the minds of the people who work there.

This much is clear: as more states confront COVID-19 outbreaks, the experiences of Wyckoff suggest there is little that can prepare hospital staff for what they will face. Mir and his colleagues were forced to improvise, troubleshooting remedies for a disease that no one understood. Alongside the medical challenge, Wyckoff battled a simultaneous contagion—an outbreak of fear that nearly crippled the hospital at its time of greatest need. Shortages of masks and disinfectant fueled that anxiety. But underneath it was the human instinct of survival, which the hospital workers still struggle to suppress. Countless times each day, they’ve had to ask themselves: Will this be the patient that gets me sick? Will this be the day I infect my family?

That terror swept through Wyckoff more quickly than the virus. Dozens of its health care workers, cleaners and technical staff walked off the job, took leave or retired, and by the height of the pandemic,

the hospital was operating without 1 in every 4 employees. The most routine chores, like disinfecting rooms or checking vital signs, still need to be weighed against the chance of infection. That pressure has had a strange effect, says Dr. Lisandro Irizarry, the head of Wyckoff’s emergency department. It strained the natural instinct of a medical worker to surround a patient with care. “When this all first started,” he tells me, “the patient was the pariah.”

**THE DIAGNOSIS** of Wyckoff’s first coronavirus case started as a hunch. Under the guidelines issued in February by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Mir should not have had reason to worry about her. She hadn’t traveled recently to any country with a major outbreak. She hadn’t been in contact with any confirmed carriers of the disease.

The U.S. medical establishment had not yet grasped how quickly the virus was spreading within American communities. Neither had the U.S. President. “We’re doing a great job with it,” Donald Trump said on March 10, almost a week after Wyckoff’s first coronavirus patient tested positive. “And it will go away. Just stay calm. It will go away.”

Mir was not so sure. His patient’s symptoms resembled what doctors in Asia and Europe had been reporting. To play it safe, he put the 82-year-old



woman in isolation the day after she arrived at the hospital. She showed signs of recovery after a week on a ventilator. But after 10 days in the hospital, she died. A bank of news cameras gathered outside of Wyckoff the next day. “To hear of the death, the first New Yorker to die related to coronavirus—this is a very painful moment,” Mayor Bill de Blasio said in announcing the news at a press conference.

For Wyckoff, it wasn’t just painful but terrifying. Twenty-eight staff members had been exposed to the patient. None had worn masks or goggles, because government guidelines were not yet urging them to do so. Now all of them, including several nurses, three paramedics and one of the hospital’s two lung-care specialists, had to begin two weeks of quarantine. Mir, who had not been exposed to the patient, was left to lead the intensive-care ward on his own.

He suspected that the staff under quarantine might soon start showing symptoms, but he did not expect one of the first to be the nurse he calls “my Amy.” That’s Amy O’Sullivan, the straight-talking, fist-pumping force of the emergency room, who was known to hit the gym after a 12-hour shift and then drive her Wrangler to the Jersey shore on weekends to go surfing with her wife and three daughters.

The oxygen levels in O’Sullivan’s blood were so low by the time she got tested in early March that

colleagues wondered how she was conscious. Mir moved her to an isolation room on the 10th floor—Room 11, next door to where the 82-year-old woman was clinging to life. He asked O’Sullivan if she could breathe without a ventilator. She shook her head no.

Through the window of her isolation room, she could see a few of her fellow nurses crying. One of the last things Mir recalls O’Sullivan saying before she went unconscious was, “Please save me, so I can get back to work.”

**MIR TOOK OVER** the intensive-care unit at Wyckoff—a 16-bed facility within the hospital—in 1998, and he’s been here ever since. From the ward’s 10th-floor windows, he can look across the East River to Manhattan, to wealthy neighborhoods with some of the city’s lowest COVID-19 death rates.

Brooklyn and Queens, by comparison, each have had more than 5,000 deaths, more than any other areas in the country by far. The reason is tied to demographics. The area around Wyckoff is predominantly poor, black and brown, with multiple families living in cramped apartments. About 30% of the population in the Wyckoff ZIP code live below the poverty line. “It went through like a blitzkrieg,” says Ramon Rodriguez, the hospital’s president and CEO. “It’s almost as if we’re washing away

### ‘THIS IS MY COMMUNITY AND MY PEOPLE.’

*Colleagues assist Dr. Asif Khan with a powered air-purifying respirator suit necessary for him to perform a procedure on a COVID-19 patient on May 22. Khan, who was raised in Queens, was serving hurricane-hit communities in Puerto Rico when the virus arrived in New York.*

*“I needed to be a part of something larger than myself.”*





**‘I FEEL HER SPIRIT NOW.’**

Rodriguez, hospital president and CEO, prays at the coffin of Venner, a union representative who died of COVID-19 in April. “I believe that there would not be any Wyckoff today if it wasn’t for Jackie and all the people who listened to Jackie,” Rodriguez said at the service in Flushing, N.Y., on May 5



a whole generation of black and Latino people.”

Incomes here are too low and health insurance too rare to sustain enough private doctors to serve the population. The result is what’s known as a primary-care desert, with Wyckoff the only source of health care for much of the community.

Its emergency room typically treats everything from rashes to upset stomachs, conditions that patients in more affluent neighborhoods might take to their family doctors. But these visitors disappeared when the pandemic started as people afraid of infection stayed away. New intensive-care units were set up on several floors of the hospital. The pediatric emergency area was converted into an adult ICU. Nurses from across the hospital were reassigned to work in it, even if they had never managed a ventilator or dealt with infectious diseases.

Many refused. The biggest problem at Wyckoff was not a shortage of ventilators or protective masks. “The biggest problem we had was staffing,” says Rodriguez. “We were running people ragged. I was starting to see people break.” Out of roughly 1,800 full-time employees, a quarter stopped coming to work at some point during the pandemic, virtually all because of illness or fear of infection.

Tamekia Melong, an intensive-care nurse, took leave the day after Wyckoff diagnosed its first patient with COVID-19. She was six months pregnant and terrified of losing her baby. Even though she never came into contact with the coronavirus patient, Melong contracted the disease and believes she infected her sister, mother and grandmother, who had to be hospitalized. All of them recovered, but Melong refuses to go back to work. “Psychologically, physically, I just can’t,” says Melong, who is due to give birth this month.

Between late March and early April, the nursing department saw 50 people calling in sick every day. “They were panicking,” says the department head, Catherine Gallogly-Simon. Each morning, she would assign nurses to shifts treating COVID-19 patients. With some of the less-experienced ones, she says, it felt like throwing them “to the wolves.”

Some hospital staff took their concerns about infection to their union delegate, Jacqueline Venner, who fought with the administration about overtime and hazard pay. It was also Venner who scolded people for skirting their work out of fear, always adding her catchphrase, “You got this.”

But she sympathized with some who stayed away. Many nurses were close to retirement, had spouses at home with health problems, or both. They had paid their dues and were not willing to risk a deadly infection at the end of their long careers. Others had weakened immune systems. One was trying to get pregnant with the help of IVF, and her doctors would not harvest her eggs if she was exposed to COVID-19.

Even for young and healthy nurses, the demands





**‘IT HAS BEEN SUCH A STRUGGLE.’**

*Marsha Williams, left, patient-care coordinator at Wyckoff’s women’s health center, wipes away tears and holds the hand of co-worker Erica Davis during Venner’s funeral. (Because of social-distancing restrictions, capacity was limited to 10 people.) Williams, whom Venner helped navigate her job, said she respected her like “a big sister.”*

**SUITING UP**

*Mir puts on personal protective equipment before his morning rounds to visit COVID-19 patients on May 20. "This is the time when you can tell who is made of what," Mir said of staff who stayed when things got bad, as others walked away*

**A NEW CUSTOM**

*Firefighters clap for Wyckoff hospital workers, who greet them while wearing protective gear, on April 25. Cheering for health care workers rose to an evening ritual in New York City as it became the pandemic's epicenter. Hospital staff have likened the outpouring of support for frontline workers, as well as the heightened demands of their jobs, to the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks*





### ANSWERING THE CALL

*Paramedics Julian Faccibene, 24, and Kassem Kassir, 31, lift a woman with COVID-19 symptoms into an ambulance. "I never thought that I would experience such massive illness and carnage in the span of several weeks," says Faccibene. "At the same time, I never realized that I would be joining a team of some of the strongest and most resilient people in the world."*



### HAPPIEST BIRTHDAY

*O'Sullivan celebrates her birthday with her wife Tiffany Latz, who is also a nurse, and daughters at their Staten Island home on April 28. O'Sullivan spent several days on a ventilator after falling ill while treating the hospital's first COVID-19 patient. She calls Latz her "superhero," her true love and "the one who got us here to this day."*

of an already difficult job became brutal. Shifts ran for well over 12 hours, often with triple the usual number of patients to manage. In the last week of March, the hospital began to run out of disinfectants, and nurses brought bleach from home to wipe down beds in the emergency room.

Asta Moorhead, the head of the department responsible for keeping Wyckoff clean, took a woman on her staff to disinfect the room of a COVID-19 patient. The woman had suited up to protect herself, but in the doorway, she froze, turned around and ran. “When I found her later, she was a mess,” Moorhead recalls. “She was crying and saying she didn’t want to die. She didn’t want her kids to get sick.”

At the end of every shift, staff risked taking the virus home on their clothes, in their hair, on the bottoms of their shoes. Their anxiety spread to their families, sometimes causing rifts between workers and their loved ones. “You’re here, caring for people, saving lives,” says Irizarry. “Then you go home, and your family members look at you as though you represent a threat to them.”

One nurse’s husband died of COVID-19. Another discovered that both her children were infected. Jamwanti Persaud, the patient-care manager in the emergency room, watched her father-in-law deteriorate, gasping for breath, until he died in early April. She lay awake and wondered, “Did I bring it home?”

**HOSPITAL STAFFING PROBLEMS** were so acute in New York by the end of March that Governor Andrew Cuomo issued a plea to the rest of the nation. “If you don’t have a health care crisis in your community, please come help us in New York now,” Cuomo said at a press conference, as the state’s death toll surpassed 1,000. “Today it’s New York; tomorrow it will be somewhere else.”

A few days later, New Yorkers’ cell phones squealed with an emergency alert, calling on “all health care workers” to come work at understaffed hospitals. It was the citywide equivalent of someone shouting: Is there a doctor in the house?

The most common approach in these situations is redeployment: ordering medical professionals from around the campus to put their usual jobs on hold and focus on the current crisis. That did not work in New York, in part because people resisted their reassignments.

Some outside help arrived in April when the U.S.N.S. *Comfort* docked in New York City and began taking COVID-19 patients—about 50 from Wyckoff by the end of the month. Mir also did some recruiting. Through a staffing agency, he found a pulmonologist in Arkansas, Dr. Rebecca Martin, who flew to New York and spent

a 96-hour workweek at Wyckoff. The scene was beyond her worst expectations. Patients were packed so tightly in the emergency room that it was hard to pass between gurneys. The supply of sedatives ran so short that patients would sometimes wake up prematurely and pull the breathing tubes out of their throats. The good news was that the hospital had enough ventilators. The bad news was the shortage of staff who knew how to work them. “Usually the news sensationalizes things,” says Martin. “Here the reality was a hundred times worse than what the news was showing.”

Martin wondered how many colleagues at her own hospital, Baxter Regional Medical Center in northern Arkansas, would stick around to fight COVID-19 if it arrived. “Some people will always feel obligated to get the job done, no matter what,” she says. “And there are some who will take any excuse they possibly can to get out of it.”

On its website, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention acknowledges the problem of fear among hospital workers—“Outbreaks can be stressful”—and offers some tips for dealing with it, such as deep breaths and exercise. But such tactics amount to “Band-Aid coping mechanisms,” says Dr. Jessica Gold, an assistant psychiatry professor at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Mo., who specializes in the mental health of medical workers.

Well before the St. Louis area experienced a surge of COVID-19, Gold saw psychological distress in the medical workers she treats. The signs often showed up in their dreams—“impending-disaster dreams, tidal waves, hurricanes, where a lot of people are dying and you can’t help them.” Efforts to treat the mental trauma of doctors and nurses amid the pandemic are in their infancy. The first center devoted to this work in the U.S. is due to open on June 15 at New York’s Mount Sinai Hospital. But its founder, Dr. Dennis Charney, is not sure how to address the anxiety of medical workers on the front lines of the pandemic, especially when it comes to their risk of infecting their families. “I don’t know how you prepare for that,” he says.

One approach would be to copy the military, which often screens soldiers for psychological fitness before sending them into combat. But U.S. hospitals do not have the luxury of screening out health care workers during a pandemic. To do that, says Gold, “you have to have enough staff” to let some people walk away.

And staff shortages have been too critical to keep that door open. On April 7, Rodriguez emailed senior management, ordering them to track down all employees and get them back to work. “This is not the time for anyone to walk away from their responsibility and their duty,” he wrote. “All of you are called to the cause of

**‘IT’S  
ALMOST AS  
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being a part of something greater than all of us.”

The soaring language had little effect. For many of the workers who heeded Rodriguez’s call, the decision had more to do with paychecks than with some higher calling. Whatever the chances of getting infected, the prospect of losing their health insurance or being unable to feed their families was worse. Jillian Primiano, an emergency-room nurse, captured the sentiment in a sign she held at a demonstration for nurses’ rights on April 6. PLEASE DON’T CALL ME A HERO, it read. I AM BEING MARTYRED AGAINST MY WILL.

Three days later, the hospital had its first staff death: Terry Small, a carpenter, died of COVID-19 on April 9. No one knows how he became infected. His job rarely put him in rooms with patients.

Venner, his union delegate, also tended to stay in her office, a mask covering the lipstick she always made sure to apply. But as union members came to see her with their complaints, the virus followed. Venner soon became a critical patient in the place where she had worked for almost 30 years.

A procession of colleagues came to check on her as Mir attached the breathing machine. Rodriguez went to see Venner one last time on April 16, two days before she died, and came out weeping. “We had our differences,” he told me. “But she was my friend.”

**ONE EVENING**, Rodriguez hung his suit jacket in the executive suite and rode the elevator down to the basement, which houses the morgue.

The burden of storing the dead falls to the hospital’s transport team, which operates out of a tiny basement office. To show his support, Rodriguez wanted to spend the night with them, collecting the dead and bringing them out to one of the refrigerated trailers the city had parked outside to hold the overflow of bodies. The morgue crew obliged, helping the chief executive into his layers of protective equipment: two masks, a face shield and a full-body suit of polyethylene.

Across the hospital, administrators used the same approach, joining staff in the trenches to raise morale. Gallogly-Simon, the head of nursing, would leave her spacious office on the second floor to work in the emergency room. The nurses were used to seeing their boss in high heels. Now she was pushing stretchers in rubber clogs, her hair tucked into a cap printed with shamrocks.

In the intensive-care ward, Mir worked for six weeks without a day off, updating health officials and colleagues while also trying to come up with an effective mix of drugs and treatments. Mir’s treatment principle was simple at first: “Throw everything at it but the kitchen sink.” Instead of medical textbooks, he used the blogs of frontline doctors from other continents to guide him. In late March, when President Trump was advocating the use of

hydroxychloroquine, an anti-malaria drug, Mir gave it to many COVID-19 patients, then observed it was impairing their heart function. From autopsy reports, he saw tiny blood clots permeating bodies of COVID-19 patients, so Mir ordered patients to get blood thinners. “I call this disease Russian roulette,” he said. One of the first patients he managed to wean off the ventilator was in his 80s. Then he treated two brothers, Miguel and Leobardo Herrera. Leobardo survived. Miguel did not. Mir shook his head. “I don’t even make predictions anymore.”

**IN MID-APRIL**, Mir brought me into the intensive-care ward to meet one of his patients, who had spent a week and a half on a ventilator. The tube had been removed from his throat the previous day.

As we put on the extra layers of rubber and polyethylene that are required to enter that part of the hospital, a fear came over me. My gut seemed to take the masks, gloves, gowns and goggles as signs of danger, and I recoiled as though we were about to enter a room full of poisonous gas or radiation. Instead, behind the heavy plastic curtains, there was just a young man on a bed, unmasked and barefoot, with more terror in his eyes than I had in mine.

He was Christopher Ward, the 29-year-old manager of a Manhattan restaurant and bar. The nurse had just brought him breakfast, and the smell of scrambled eggs mixed with the odor of disinfectants. The tube had strained his vocal cords and left his voice a raspy whisper. The virus, he said, had infected several family members. The last thing he remembered before the anesthesia kicked in was pleading with Mir to get him a ventilator before the nation’s stockpile ran out.

There were no flowers or greeting cards in his room. None were allowed. To minimize the risk of infection, nurses avoided entering the room except when necessary. Ward did not blame them. “They have good reason to be scared,” he says. Once his phone was charged, it began buzzing with messages from his mother Jacqueline. Forbidden from visiting, she had been keeping vigil at home, texting him passages from Scripture as a comfort to them both.

She didn’t know how slim her son’s chances had been. Only one in five COVID-19 patients at Wyckoff were making it off the ventilator. Recovery is treacherous for those who survive. Some patients feel better after the tube is removed, texting with family members and talking to their doctors. Then they collapse while trying to stand, their oxygen levels plummeting so fast that they need to be resuscitated.

The day after we met, Ward texted me that he was feeling better. Ten minutes later he wrote again: “I think I’m dying.” His mother got a similar message from her son that day: “I may not make it.” But two





**'I'VE JUST BEEN  
REBORN.'**

*José Antonio Blanco,  
who was on a ventilator  
for weeks and nearly  
died, gasps as he  
takes his first breaths  
on his own after his  
tracheostomy tube was  
removed on May 26.*

*A thick glass wall  
protected Mir and Khan  
from infection as they  
took out the tube*





**‘THEY ARE  
IN A BETTER  
PLACE THAN  
HERE.’**

*Balloons are released after a prayer circle on May 8 honoring colleagues and patients who died from the virus. “My heart was very sad for weeks,” said nurse and New York City clergyman Carlos Marroquin, “praying not only for the patients who we have in our building but also praying for each of us who was in action.”*

weeks later, Ward was ready to go home. The nurses who had cared for him and taken his worried family’s calls gathered to see him off, a row of figures in white suits and masks applauding the young man as he made his way to the entrance, where his mother was waiting.

It was April 20, and the emergency room was nothing like it had been when Ward arrived. The nurses were afraid to jinx their luck by uttering the words “calm” and “quiet.” But for the moment, the hospital was both. The makeshift triage ward in the entryway stood empty. The pharmacy reopened. Amy O’Sullivan, the nurse who’d been near death after treating Wyckoff’s first COVID-19 patient, had recovered and was back at work, her healthy breaths rising up from her mask to steam her glasses.

The lull gave the hospital a chance to consider its future. Regular patients were still afraid to come for treatment or elective surgeries, and fewer patients mean less money. The American Hospital Association, an industry group, calculates that losses for hospitals nationwide will come to more than \$200 billion from the beginning of March through the end of June.

The federal government gave Wyckoff \$59 million in May to help it survive, but Rodriguez says the money will hardly last till the end of the year.

“We’re living on fumes,” he told an all-staff conference call on May 20.

**HAVING FINISHED HIS ROUNDS**, Mir went into his office one afternoon in May, closed the door and removed his mask. He’d been showing me around for almost a month. Yet this was the first time I had seen his face. It gave me a jolt, like finding a stranger in a familiar room, and it forced my mind to redraw the features it had invented for him. His nose was longer and his mouth wider than I had imagined. In this new company, his eyes seemed sadder than they had above his mask.

He told me he had stayed in touch with Rebecca Martin, the Arkansas pulmonologist, sending her updates as her hospital prepared for the pandemic. His news was seldom reassuring. The virus had taken four lives among the Wyckoff staff, and their portraits were displayed in the entryway, beneath a sign that read, **REST IN ETERNAL PEACE**. Antibody testing of roughly half the hospital’s workers found that at least 22% of them—or 186 people as of early June—had been infected with the virus.

Martin realizes how poorly her years of medical training had prepared her for the risks she faced at Wyckoff. “In theory,” she tells me, “medical school teaches you that your own health and well-being is



often secondary to others.’” But it does not teach you how to decide between treating a highly contagious patient and protecting your family’s health.

Throughout the outbreak of COVID-19, medical workers have often been held to impossible standards, as though their training brings with it a level of superhuman courage. The reality is far more complicated. For every story of selflessness and sacrifice at Wyckoff, there are stories of medical workers who walked away, usually because they put family first.

At the end of May, Rodriguez announced a \$2,500 bonus for employees who’d remained on the job through the pandemic.

That forced Wyckoff’s managers and union leaders to face some tormenting questions: Who made the cut for what some workers called the “hero bonus,” and who did not? What about the nurse whose husband died of COVID-19, forcing her to miss work and care for their children? What about the workers who got infected and went on sick leave? What about the families of staff who died of this disease? What about those who needed just a few days off to deal with their anguish and fear of infection? Did they not deserve the bonus?

In the end, Rodriguez was forced to reverse his decision. Instead, every employee will get a much smaller bonus, whether they worked through the

pandemic or not.

He says he was tempted at times to apply military logic: “If you don’t go forward, you’re a deserter.” But the pandemic is not a war. Bullets and bombs are not contagious. And Wyckoff could not demand that all employees put their loved ones in the line of fire. “If someone is afraid, we respect that they’re afraid,” Rodriguez says.

Mir sees it differently. The truancy of some colleagues pained him, and he has little patience for their arguments that the risks of infection were too high. “What does that make the rest of us,” he asks, referring to workers who accepted those risks, “chopped liver?”

His office windows overlook a wide expanse of rooftops, the homes of the people Wyckoff serves, “very poor people, very sick people,” he says, “young lives, old lives.” Nearly all of them were strangers to Mir, but he did not think it strange to risk his own life for their care, nor even the lives of his loved ones. He says he would do it again, and as the next wave of the pandemic hangs in the distance, maybe a month from now, maybe more, all of Wyckoff could be called to treat another surge of COVID-19 patients. At least next time they will know what to expect, from this disease and from themselves. —With reporting by MERIDITH KOHUT □

**‘I’M NOT O.K.  
I’M NOT.  
I KNOW IT.’**

*Raymond Valentin was born at Wyckoff.*

*A lead security guard who works with the temporary morgues, he has woken up screaming from nightmares about being locked inside, surrounded by bodies. Valentin found his colleague and close friend Joey Figueroa dead from COVID-19 in Figueroa’s home. He died alone, refusing help. “It was like he was protecting all of us,” Valentin said. “He didn’t want us to get sick.”*

**'I'M JUST TRYING  
TO STAY ALIVE.'**

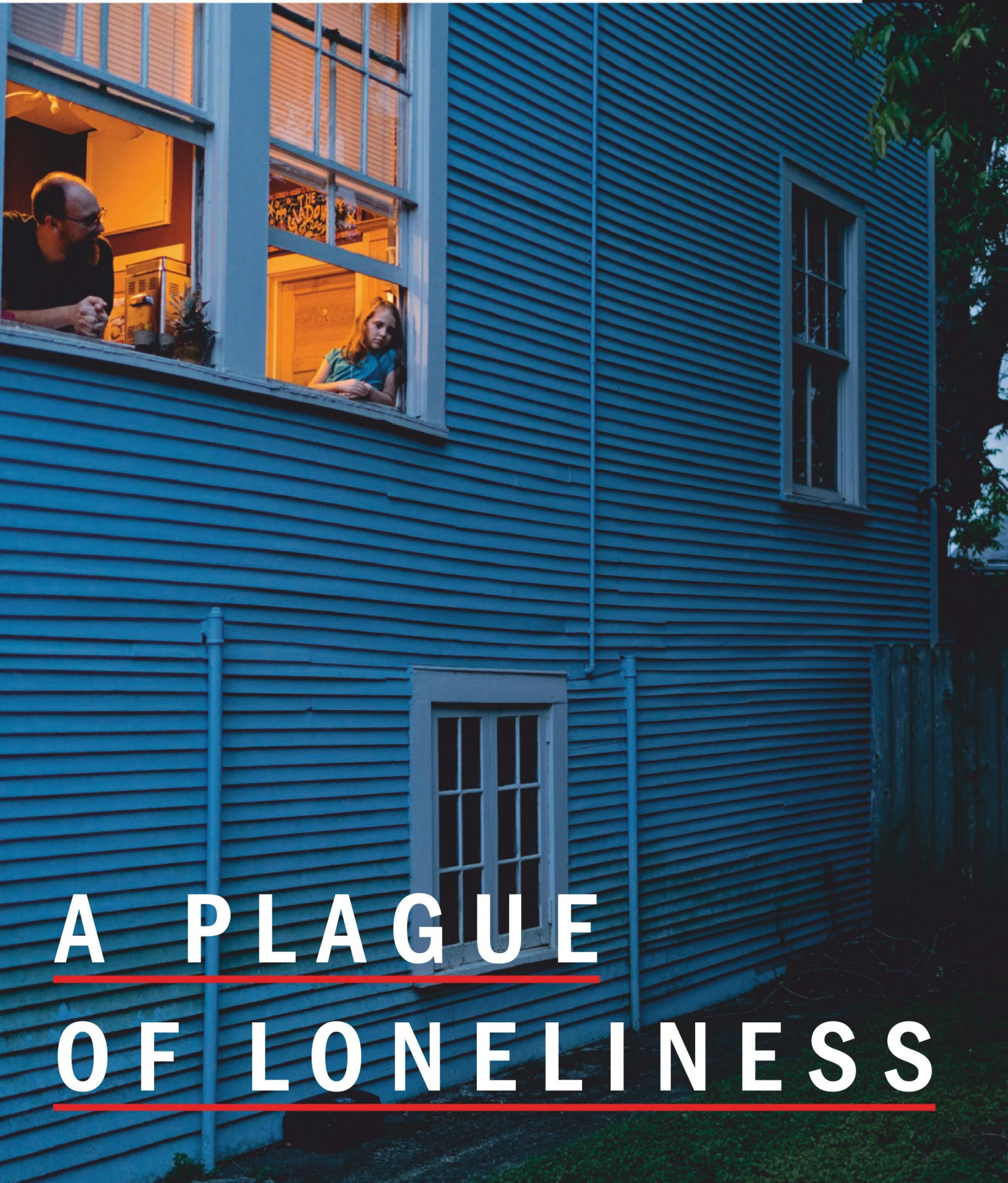
*Kyle Edwards, 39, collects lanterns from inside a temporary morgue outside the hospital on April 22. Edwards, whose job sometimes involved moving bodies of COVID-19 victims to the morgue, worked 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. shifts during the worst of the pandemic and, like many members of his team, contracted the virus. His family asked him to take time off until the virus died down, but Edwards kept working. He and his wife trained their 5-year-old son to not hug him immediately when he gets home: "Daddy has to wash the coronavirus off him when he gets home from the hospital," the boy will tell others*





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AFTER ISOLATION



# A PLAGUE OF LONELINESS

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANNIE FLANAGAN FOR TIME



*Caitrin Gladow at home with her family during the COVID-19 outbreak in New Orleans on April 28*

## Americans were already lonely. Then COVID-19 hit

BY JAMIE DUCHARME

DRIVING AROUND HER KEARNEY, MO., neighborhood is both respite and torture for Kathie Hodgson. She likes seeing other people out and about; it reminds her what life was like before COVID-19. But Hodgson, a 41-year-old teacher who lives alone after a recent divorce, says seeing happy families playing in their yards or walking their dogs can also send her plunging deep into a spiral of loneliness.

“You know, as much as I have valued my independence in the past year, it’s finally hitting me that I would like to curl up on the couch with somebody at night,” Hodgson says.

The irony, Hodgson notes, is she was thrilled to live alone before the coronavirus pandemic hit, enjoying her “me time” and the newfound ability to date and see friends whenever she wanted. But now that she’s confined to her apartment almost 24 hours a day, she is feeling the emptiness of her home acutely.

“Some days I smile and feel O.K.,” Hodgson says. “And other days I curl up in a ball and wonder if this goes on too much longer, will I be able to take it mentally? Can I last sanely living alone for months—a year?”

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, public-health experts were concerned about an epidemic of loneliness in the U.S. The coronavirus has exacerbated that problem, with most face-to-face socializing still limited to members of people’s own households. For the 35.7 million Americans who live alone, that means no meaningful social contact at all, potentially for months on end.

Experts are rightly concerned about the mental-health ramifications of this widespread isolation, especially since there’s no agreed-upon tipping point at which acute loneliness transitions into a chronic



## AFTER ISOLATION

problem with long-term consequences. A group of doctors from Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School even warned in an April 22 commentary in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* that physical distancing and stress caused by the pandemic, combined with rising firearm sales, could worsen the suicide crisis the U.S. has been weathering for more than a decade.

But some mental-health advocates are optimistic that COVID-19 will finally give loneliness the mainstream recognition it deserves—possibly paving the way for a more socially connected future.

**FOR SUCH** a common experience, loneliness is surprisingly slippery to define clinically. Loneliness is not included in the *DSM-5*, the official diagnostic manual for mental-health disorders, but it goes hand in hand

with many conditions that are. It's often lumped together with social isolation, but the two concepts are different. Social isolation is an objective indicator of how much contact somebody has with other people, whereas loneliness is "the subjective feeling of isolation," says Dr. Carla Perissinotto, a geriatrician at the University of California, San Francisco, who studies loneliness. Being alone doesn't necessarily mean you're lonely, nor does being around people mean you're not, Perissinotto says. Loneliness is a feeling only the person experiencing it can identify.

It can also be difficult to untangle whether loneliness is a symptom or a cause of a larger health issue: Do people withdraw socially because they're depressed, or do they become depressed because they're lonely? In any case, studies show chronic loneliness has clear links to an array of health problems, including

dementia, depression, anxiety, self-harm, heart conditions and substance abuse. People without social support also have lower chances of full recovery after a serious illness than people with a strong network, studies show. The health consequences of loneliness are often likened to the effects of smoking 15 cigarettes a

day—and they're far more common. While the most recent data show 14% of U.S. adults smoke cigarettes, a January report from health insurer Cigna suggested around 60% felt some loneliness before the pandemic.

After stay-at-home orders were instated, roughly a third of American adults reported feeling lonelier than usual, according to an April survey by social-advice company SocialPro. Another April survey, for financial-research group ValuePenguin, put the number even

higher, at 47%. (Chronic loneliness may have seen a smaller bump. A June *JAMA* study found that 14% of U.S. adults "always or often" felt lonely in April 2020, compared with 11% in 2018.) If the stereotype of a lonely person is a frail, elderly adult living alone, the pandemic has exposed the truth that was there all along: anyone, anywhere, of any age can experience loneliness.

SocialPro's survey of 1,228 adults found that at least 20% in each age group were lonelier than usual as a result of coronavirus. Millennials were among the most likely to feel lonely before COVID-19, research shows, and that's no different now; 34% of millennials in the survey said they were "always or often" lonelier because of the pandemic.

Gender wasn't a predictor, either: about 25% of women and 30% of men said they felt coronavirus-related loneliness. Nor does one's living situation necessarily dictate feelings. Caitrin Gladow, 41, has spent the past few months at home in New Orleans with her husband and three young kids—but she says she's never felt more alone. She says she has zero emotional energy for self-care while juggling work, parenting, "paralyzing" stress, and anxiety and grief from losing people in her community to coronavirus. There's also guilt for feeling overwhelmed when so many people are worse off, she says.

"Even in a house full of screaming children who I love more than anything, I feel especially vulnerable," Gladow says. She feels pressure "to be the glue of the family, and I'm trying not to let them down, but in the process I'm crumbling."

And of course, elderly adults do remain at high risk of loneliness. Given their susceptibility to serious COVID-19 infections, older adults are now likely to be even more cut off from outside life. NORC at the University of Chicago found the pandemic has made about a third of adults 70 and older lonelier than usual.

In other words, loneliness is everywhere, especially now. "This is a huge topic, but it's been kind of sidelined," Perissinotto says. "Now everyone is forced to look at this in a different way. We can't keep ignoring this."

**TECHNOLOGY HAS EMERGED** as an imperfect solution. Video-chat platforms like Zoom are surging in popularity, and nearly every social-media network is billing itself as a way to stay connected with friends virtually. Telecom companies like Samsung have donated smart devices to help people in quarantine stay connected.

There are also community groups attempting to make digital communication more meaningful. Some existed before COVID-19 but have expanded to meet surging demand, like Let's Be Authentic, a Philadelphia-area social group that pairs up members for weekly video chats and communication exercises. It has seen a noticeable uptick in use of its online programs, a company

## LONELINESS RISING

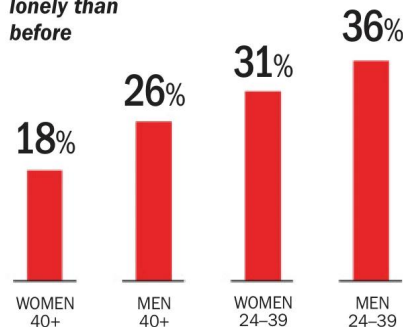
Loneliness has been a problem for years. The pandemic has made it worse

Americans **feeling lonely** pre-virus

54%	61%
2018	2019

People who, because of the virus, **feel more lonely than before**

22%	31%
U.K., CANADA, AUSTRALIA	U.S.



**'WILL I BE ABLE TO TAKE IT MENTALLY? CAN I LAST SANELY LIVING ALONE FOR MONTHS—A YEAR?'**

representative says. And the Maryland department of aging is piloting a program in which any elderly person who signs up gets a personalized weekly phone call from a volunteer. “They know someone is there for them should they need it, and that alone makes you feel good,” says department secretary Rona Kramer.

Other groups have popped up in direct response to the crisis. A team of Cornell students built the platform Quarantine Buddy to match up users with similar interests for virtual conversations, and has so far attracted at least 8,000 people in 64 countries, ranging in age from 18 to 80.

But research suggests not everyone benefits equally from digital interactions. Several studies have found that tools like video chats and instant messages may help elderly adults feel less lonely, especially if they’re physically isolated from others and cannot otherwise socialize. Yet, interestingly, research shows that loneliness may subside for younger adults when they reduce their social-media usage. In regular life, that may be because endless scrolling through other people’s social-media posts makes young people feel left out, or it may be because it’s replacing valuable in-person moments; under COVID-19 lockdown, social media may simply serve as a painful reminder of their loved ones’ physical absence. In ValuePenguin’s recent survey, 10% of respondents said video chats only make them feel lonelier.

Jessica Pflugrath, a 27-year-old freelance writer and editor who lives alone in Brooklyn, has been using video chats to stay connected with her friends, but she says they bring a nagging feeling of unease. The ebb and flow of an in-person conversation doesn’t always translate to video, and she doesn’t like the pressure of having to be “on” all the time; she also doesn’t like how easily digital conversations lend themselves to distraction. “There’s a lack of feeling present with people, in general,” she says.

But with few other options available, people should probably make the best of virtual platforms, says Rudolph Tanzi, vice chair of neurology and director of the genetics and aging research unit at Massachusetts General Hospital. Stress related to loneliness can trigger inflammation in the body, he says, which in turn is linked to a host of chronic conditions.

Social interaction is just as important for quelling that stress response as physical behaviors like getting enough sleep, exercising, practicing yoga or meditation, and following a balanced diet, he says.

“We use the term *social distancing*, but it’s completely the wrong term,” Tanzi says. “You want *physical distancing*. That doesn’t exclude social interaction via some of these Internet platforms.”

How much emotional benefit you get from virtual communication may come down to your mindset, says Jenny Taitz, an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles. “If we write off a friend texting us,” she says, “we’re not going to be able to enjoy or savor the dose of connection that they’re offering us.” Studies have shown that feeling socially supported can make a measurable difference for mental health, regardless of how much socializing you’re actually doing.

Christine-Marie Liwag Dixon, 30, has had years of practice communicating virtually. Most of Dixon’s family are in the Philippines, but she and her husband live in the New York suburbs, so extended family gatherings are rare. “I have more than a dozen cousins, and we’ve never all been in the same room,” she says. For years, Dixon has had to get by on small gestures of love, like a text or a picture of an especially good meal. That can be enough, if you frame it right, she says. “Even little, sporadic reminders like that remind us that no matter how far apart we are, even if we don’t see each other regularly . . . we still love each other, we’re still connected, and we’re still a family.”

But for truly lasting change, the health care system also needs to buy in. A February report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine concluded that health professionals should be screening seniors for loneliness, and entering warning signs into patients’ medical records just like any other condition. In the wake of COVID-19, that may become a best practice for patients of all ages. The report’s authors also called on the government and health insurers to fund research into loneliness, and pushed

for awareness campaigns about the scope of the problem among people of all ages. What can help now? Mindfulness training and cognitive behavioral therapy can be valuable anti-loneliness tools for people young or old, since reframing the way one perceives social support can make an appreciable difference in feelings of loneliness, Taitz says. These techniques can be easily taught over telehealth platforms.

**‘NOW EVERYONE IS FORCED TO LOOK AT THIS IN A DIFFERENT WAY. WE CAN’T KEEP IGNORING THIS.’**

**AT THE VERY LEAST,** COVID-19 is making loneliness easier to talk about, which could encourage people who struggle with it to seek help or reach out to connections they do have, Perissinotto says. There’s a certain amount of stigma

attached to any mental illness, but loneliness can be uniquely uncomfortable to talk about. It can feel like a personal failing to admit you don’t have the social network you want, and there’s a tendency for others to blame the victim, Perissinotto says. In one 1992 *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* study, participants rated a fictional lonely person as less likable, social, competent and attractive than a nonlonely person. Experts hope that the fact that loneliness is now mainstream and easier than ever to talk about will finally change that perception.

Claire Lejeune, a 24-year-old photographer who lives in Los Angeles, says she’s not a lonely person by nature; her job, after all, involves being around people, and she’s active and social in her personal life. But when two of her roommates left her apartment to shelter in place elsewhere and the third began keeping mostly to himself, she says she found herself truly lonely for the first time she could remember—and somewhat uncomfortable with that realization.

“I’m privileged and not doing as terribly as some people are in quarantine. I felt kind of bad to even say that I’m lonely because it’s like, ‘Oh, woe is she,’” Lejeune says. But when she tweeted about her feelings, she says she was met with a wave of support from people going through the same thing. “There was definitely a sense of community within the loneliness,” she says. “Everyone can relate to it.” □

AFTER ISOLATION

LYING  
IN  
WAIT

Distance may protect  
us from COVID-19,  
but alone on my farm,  
I worry that another  
crisis is on the horizon

BY LAUREN SLATER





PRONE TO DEPRESSION TO BEGIN WITH, and living alone on an 80-acre farm, I have found myself fighting those dark dogs and thinking, on more than one occasion, that while we are trying to mitigate one pandemic, we may inadvertently be causing another. The times I have been out have seemed surreal, everyone's face covered with masks, some black, some white and some fancy, with floral fabric and even lace trim, but that can't change the fact that half of the human face has been eradicated by this virus, only the eyes visible. They say that the eyes are the windows to the soul, but COVID has taught me that this is untrue. The eyes tell part of the story, but the soul can be glimpsed only when one has access to the whole of the human face. Cut off from the curve of the lips, the regal or ski-sloped nose, the tell-tale dents of dimples and the road-map-like wrinkles that can form in later years, the eyes can seem almost slippery.

My farm is in Fitchburg, Mass., an old mill town that has seen better days. As warm weather arrives, Fitchburg usually opens its farmers' market, which has a transformative effect. Suddenly the dull alleyways and cryptic roads begin to blossom as boxes of produce spill onto tables set up for selling. Not this year, though. COVID will keep that busy market closed until July. Meanwhile, in essential stores there are boxes made of blue masking tape indicating where you should stand, 6 ft. away from any other masked shopper, an acrylic sheet hung from the ceiling separating you from the people working the registers who take your money with a latex grip.

Sometimes I want to cry out, if only to hear how my sound might sever the silence that has descended seemingly everywhere, the river rushing at the edge of my land sounding preternaturally loud. This river runs in every season, and its noisy garble has come, for me, to represent the COVID-19 virus, a sound impossible to understand, a sound that permeates everything I do or think, a sound that blots out other, smaller sounds that could bring comfort, anything, really, the weeping of wind or the clop-clop of my horses' hooves on the cement floor of my barn. Every place I go I hear that river; I hear it in my bedroom at night when I log on to my computer and look up the latest figures in my state with its rising death toll.

## AFTER ISOLATION

Walking through Walgreens, I sometimes long to rip the masks off the faces of those nearby, just to touch. This suggests to me that I am in a sorry state, my plate seeming empty, my mood dour. Before COVID I thought I had mastered the art of independent living. I chop my own wood. I grow my own food. I fix the engines of lawn tractors and mowers, mastering circuits and sparks. Now I know that my mastery was but an illusion. Now I know that aloneness is deeper and more fraught than anything I could have imagined. *Quarantine*. What a weird word. It puts me in mind of barred windows, of asylums, of bright tubercular blood on a white cloth.

Fact of the matter is, I have become depressed, living my COVID days. While my tolerance for aloneness is huge, it is no match for this virus and what it demands from us to stay safe.

I never knew, until now, how truly important are the small gestures of goodwill one finds in a stranger's smile, in the brushing of hands, in the clatter of commerce. Even my land, it seems, has succumbed. It is now green and lush, the snow no longer, but in moments of extreme isolation, when my mood shifts, as it often does, my fields bleach out, so that the world looks white, an endless expanse that frightens me because it can seem like color will never come back.

**FROM THE LATE 1950S** to the 1960s, a psychologist by the name of Harry Harlow performed a spate of cruel but illuminating experiments on some of our closest mammalian cousins. He removed baby rhesus monkeys from their mothers and gave them two surrogate "monkey" mothers instead. For one group of the infants, one mother dispensed milk but, made of coiled wire, was sharp to the touch, and one was essentially a cardboard cone wrapped in terry cloth and string. Harlow's aim was to test out the assertion that there were five primary human drives—hunger, thirst, sex, pain and elimination—that would supplant anything that got in their way.

His experiments were deep and dra-

matic. The babies, taken from their real mothers, choo-chooed in fear, the lab filled with jungle sounds and with the smell of desperation as the tiny rhesus infants oozed loose scat, Harlow noting all this as evidence of high emotionality.

Was Harlow simply a cruel fiend? Probably not. He first performed his experiment in the 1950s, which was an especially cold time in child rearing, still influenced by behaviorist John

Watson, who notably wrote in 1928 that parents should not kiss their children but should instead shake their hands before sending them to bed. However, Harlow had a hunch. He watched and waited, and as he did, something strange began to happen. The baby rhesuses crept along the floors of the cages. They came to "monkey" mother No. 1, the cardboard cone wrapped in terry-cloth

towels and bits of soft string. They fingered the towels, taking them in their agile hands and then mouthing their rough yet soft surface. Mesmerized, they continued to stroke and sniff, while "monkey" mother No. 2, with a single but perfectly proportioned breast, sat on her side of the cage, ready to quell both hunger and thirst. Eventually the baby monkeys discovered her, and it didn't take long for them to clamber up her side and sate themselves with milk, but that was that. They never hung around the milk mother. They never clung to her in fear, or batted her in playfulness. They never showed any kind of feeling for her whatsoever. All feeling, all cuddle, all touch and stroke were reserved for the terry-cloth-toweled mother who dispensed not a single drip, and yet, even so, the babies clearly preferred her, needed her.

Harlow was on the edge of a critical discovery that we, in an age of quarantines and COVID, may be forgetting. His experiment with the baby monkeys suggested that although thirst and

hunger may be primary human drives, addressing them alone is likely not enough. What mammals need—what they crave—is the comfort of closeness, fingers interlaced, mouth to mouth, the mingling of breath, everything we can't do as we angle to escape the exponential growth of this virus.

Research has amply demonstrated that when we touch one another a hormone called oxytocin gets released in the brain. Called the hormone of love, it is a warm wash that quells anxiety, fear, sadness, depression. It is present in huge amounts right after mothers give birth, allowing them to bond with their babies, but you don't need to go through labor to get an oxytocin high; hand upon hand will do the trick just fine.

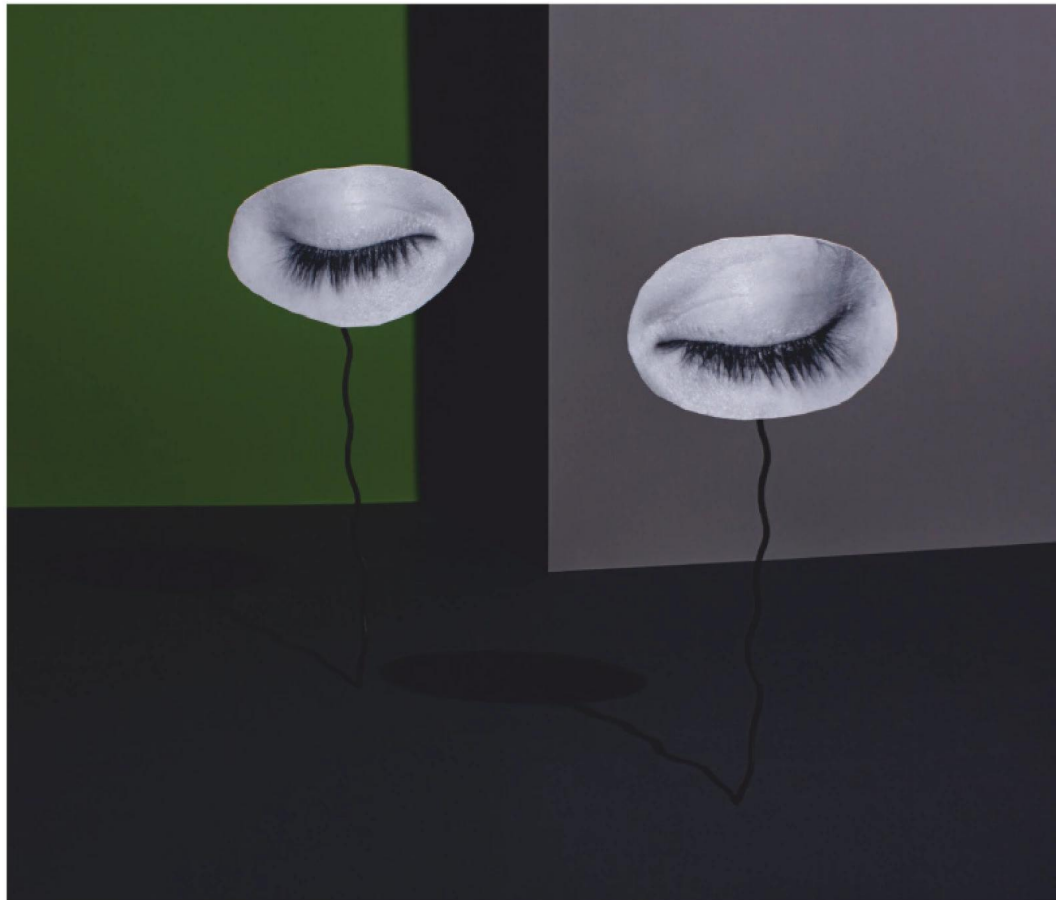
Even in times of health and wealth, depression looms at the periphery of many human lives, a black hole with some serious suction that can whoosh you off your sensible feet in five seconds flat. According to the CDC, nearly 1 in 10 Americans will experience a depressive illness within a given year. We lose loads of money to the syndrome in all sorts of ways—sufferers unable to get to work or, once at work, unable to fulfill their job responsibilities. The total economic burden is estimated to be a whopping \$210.5 billion per year. And while we take sickness seriously, we do not, as a society, give mental illness its due,

even when researchers uncover or discover biological markers or neural substrates to psychic suffering.

Now, forced to stand separate while the virus makes its rounds, we are all at risk for a descent into despair. In fact, since the beginning of the pandemic and its associated isolation mandates, Americans have been reporting more depression and anxiety than before the virus, with roughly 30% of adults reporting symptoms each week since April 23—nearly triple the amount during the same period last year, according to the CDC. Even as businesses begin to reopen, we are still urged to keep our distance, our masks

**I THOUGHT I  
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on. Those who are considered high-risk must continue to remain isolated, and the handshake may be gone forever.

**COVID HAS COME**, and it will, eventually, go, although what its exit will be like no one knows. Quarantine and social distancing may indeed be saving lives, and I, for one, would certainly not recommend anything in their place, but even as we do what we need to do to stay alive, someone should be watching out for a second, still secret pandemic on the heels of this one, a pandemic of depression born of loneliness and lack of touch. Unlike the baby rhesus monkeys, we cannot cling to towels and so seek succor. We have no surrogates that can take the place of hand upon hand, of tongue, of teeth, of torso.

Deprived of intimacy and just plain friendliness, we are all at risk. Anyone who has been through a major depression will tell you it is *big*. It is scary. It robs you of will and words. It is the hopeless, lightless place, the ninth circle

of hell. Will we be, are we now, husked humans? Will we adapt to these social conditions and become Spock-like, minus the ears? I doubt it. But I don't doubt that depression is, if not right around the corner, for some at least already here, as we navigate the surreal world of contagion.

In the meantime, I lie in wait. I feel something solid in my stomach, something leadlike and heavy that makes movement difficult. My house sits in a valley surrounded by steep banks of loam. Craving color one day, I went to Home Depot and bought as many heather plants as I could cram into my car. The plants have spiky, stout branches on a mound of dry green, each branch studded with the smallest scarlet flowers that blow off in the barest breeze, leaving a litter of red in their wake. Shovel in hand I scooped out 20, 30 holes in that hill behind my house and dropped the heathers into their new homes, hoping they would root and return, somehow surviving the winter wind and ice to rebloom

next spring in a time when COVID is behind us. I bent down and broke off a branch and held it up to the late light, the sun gilding it gold, the rip ragged, the innards green and living. Thinking of Harlow's monkeys, I put the branch into my mouth and sucked hard, tasting a tang of something sweet and salty both, and for reasons I did not understand I suddenly had tremendous energy, a surge of goodwill, hitched high on optimism, the sky above me purple and vivid, the clouds lit from within, the first stars faint, the sun seeping as she set. *Next year, next year, next year.* There would be, or might be, a time when the virus is behind us, when we are open again, when we can waft here and there and everywhere, my heathers healthy, glowing in the hill, night falling fast but the plants still beaming, as if they had sucked on some sun and were now stuffed with her light.

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*Slater is the author of Blue Dreams: The Science and the Story of the Drugs That Change Our Minds*



AFTER ISOLATION

# STUCK WITH YOURSELF

The hidden price of a pandemic  
that has already cost so much

BY SAM LANSKY

AT THE DAWN OF THE PANDEMIC, AS businesses shuttered and frontline workers braved inadequate conditions and the death toll began to tick frighteningly upward, I was home alone, nursing one selfish obsession: that I would use this time to get in really good shape. I am not proud of this—I would much rather write that I was raising money for communities disproportionately affected by this crisis, or delivering meals to the immunocompromised—but it's the truth. The more I thought about it, the more the idea sharpened in my mind's eye: this persistent fantasy of how I would emerge anew once the lockdown lifted, athletic

and radiant, the best I'd ever been. I envisioned myself on the book tour for my upcoming novel, reading a moving passage to a rapt audience, which would probably include several ex-boyfriends who would lament that they had ever let me get away. Afterward, I would take shirtless pictures by a swimming pool under a cloudless blue sky. It was the shallowest, most inconsequential thing that I could fixate on during such a profoundly upsetting time, and probably for that exact reason, it became my lifeline.

It began innocuously—even virtuously. After all, exercise is recommended as a treatment for depression, which I've





## AFTER ISOLATION

battled for years. In the morning, I would unroll my yoga mat and take a streaming workout. But soon, one workout didn't feel like enough, so instead I took two. Then three. I ordered ankle weights, dumbbells and a food scale. Counted calories. Cut carbs. Began intermittent fasting. Bought a Fitbit, which I picked up from Target that same day wearing a mask and gloves; I couldn't wait the two days it would take to ship. I would wake at 5 a.m. to exercise for three hours before my workday began. I ate no-cheat meals. I took no days off. Between sets, I would scan Twitter or read the news until a wave of nauseous dread bubbled up inside me, and then I would do more sit-ups. When I reached my "goal weight"—a number I'd picked arbitrarily—I reset it for 10 lb. less. As soon as I woke up, I started thinking about how I could get thinner that day. I'd never had this much control over my environment before. With nowhere to go, I went inward—then found myself trapped there.

None of this, strictly speaking, was new. I spent my 19th birthday in inpatient eating-disorder treatment, where I was the only male patient. (Although I felt like a unicorn at the time, studies indicate that 10 million men in the U.S. will suffer from an eating disorder at some point in their life, as will 20 million women.) It was just one attempt at improving the persistent problem of my mental health during the course of my early adulthood, which seemed to shape-shift as it attached to new expressions of dysfunction: depression, anxiety, addiction and compulsive behavior. Ultimately I got sober and became someone who appeared, more or less, to have it together. I published a memoir about my troubled teenage years and wrote cover stories for this magazine. Living in my brain never felt easy—like so many people who have struggled with mental illness, I had the sensation that crisis was always lapping at my feet like a rising tide, though I kept managing to avoid having to swim in it outright.

But in the past couple of years, I thought I'd made headway toward real healing, so much so that it had become one of the big themes of the novel I'd written. It was the story of a young man, much like me, who meets a mysterious healer who promises to "fix" his emotional issues in

three days. As he begins to face the ghosts in his past, he interrogates the problem of thinking of oneself as broken in the first place. I'd thought while promoting the book—looking very trim, of course—I would deliver inspirational speeches about the transformative power of self-acceptance. Now that was the very thing upon which it seemed I had lost my grip, and I felt like a fraud, backsliding into addictive patterns I'd believed I'd conquered.

On a macro level, the pandemic has exposed the fragility of so much that many of us took for granted, from our economy to our health care system. Yet when I look at myself, what I see laid bare by the crisis is how all the systems I used to keep myself feeling whole were more precarious than I'd ever realized: the morning meditation practice that no longer quiets my mind, the therapist who's now glitchy over Skype or the 12-step meetings that keep getting hacked. I am more fortunate than most: I am still employed; my housing is stable; even the fact that I have hours available to compulsively exercise, as opposed to scrambling to cover bills, as many people must, is a form of privilege. But mental health is not a luxury good, and when I talk to friends about how they are coping in the lockdown era, it seems as if most, if not all of us, are on the verge of cracking.

**LIKE MOST PROFESSIONAL** young adults, I subscribe to a culture of self-improvement, the belief that I can always be getting better, stronger or faster. It's not enough to endure the global pandemic, or so I tell myself. If I were made of really strong stuff, I would find some way to thrive through it. I could make this story as cleanly aspirational as a before-and-after picture, inviting the world to marvel at my accomplishment. Everyone says Shakespeare wrote *King Lear* during quarantine; I got abs. Who cares how, or what it took to get there? That's particularly tricky because my self-harm took a socially desirable shape. (It's particularly valuable among other gay men, a community that's long privileged a certain type of body.) But being home alone with an eating disorder is a problem, no matter the angle.

**OUR ONLY  
COMPANY  
RIGHT NOW  
MAY BE  
OUR DEMONS**

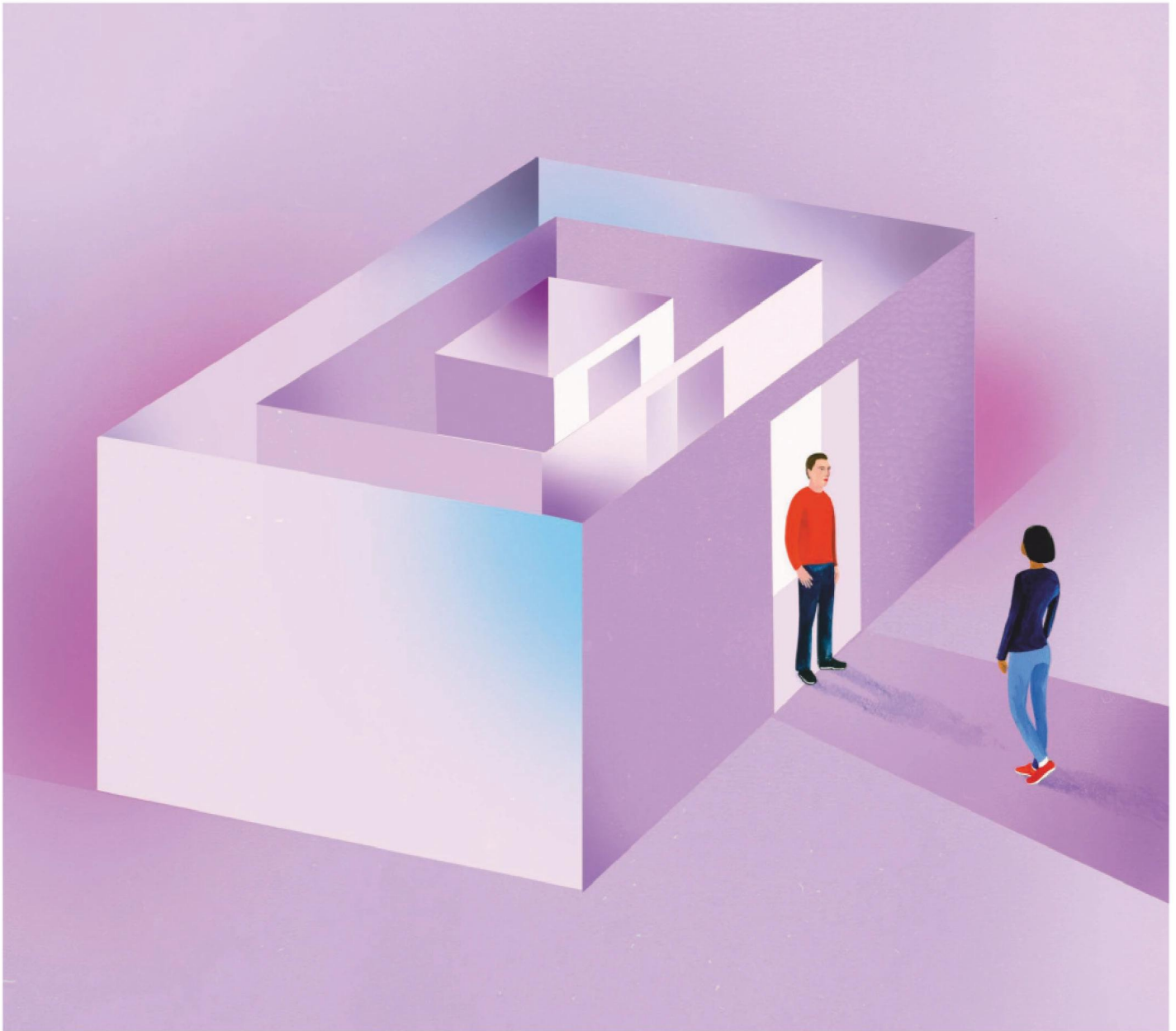
Those of us who struggle with mental illness have known for a long time that isolation is a symptom of our disease. What happens when isolation is also a public-health mandate?

In a recent poll, nearly 40% of American adults reported that their mental health has been negatively affected by the pandemic. Another sobering report indicated that beyond the 100,000 people who have already died from COVID-19 in the U.S., as many as 75,000 more could die what's termed "deaths of despair"—from substance abuse or suicide—as a result of the consequences of the pandemic, both social and economic. Those numbers are unthinkable.

Many resources are now available virtually, a crucial shift: in March, call volume to the national help line run by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration jumped nearly 900% higher than that same month last year. But anyone who's spent time in a 12-step program, been in therapy or even just had an honest conversation with a trusted friend can tell you that one of the most vital resources available to us is connection: the simple, radical act of piercing the divide between the frightened, insular self and the people around us who might seek to understand. There's a difference between a grainy face on a screen and the embrace of a loved one. In order to be truly vulnerable, we need to be felt.

For me, the tools that I relied upon to feel well often looked less like treatment and more like the ingredients that make up a full, joyful life: the friends I saw for long, intimate dinners; the work events that made me feel purposeful and accomplished; even the affirming gym I went to in the mornings, which had as much body diversity as anyone is likely to find in a city like Los Angeles. As a single person living alone, without the anchor of a family, I didn't think of these things as extravagances—I thought of them as the cornerstones of my life in recovery. It had never occurred to me that they were actually a kind of scaffolding that could be stripped away overnight.

This is the problem that confronts many of the people who are living through this epidemic alone: our only company



right now may be our demons. But the shame or self-consciousness we might feel over struggling is the same poison that makes us struggle in the first place: that there must be something wrong with us, that we are alone in what we're feeling, that anyone we share it with could only experience it as a burden. So it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: we feel bad for feeling bad, and feeling bad just makes us feel worse.

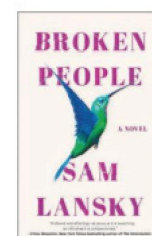
**IT'S A CLICHÉ** that addicts are self-absorbed, and why wouldn't we be? Good luck clearing the space to think about anything but yourself over the deranged, screaming choirs of your unmet cravings. It's why the 12 steps prescribe service as part of treatment—it's the opposite of every addict's naturally self-oriented first impulse. But when opportunities for service evaporate because of a tectonic shift in our world, it's easy for that selfishness to creep back in.

After nine weeks of pushing myself, a dull ache in my right foot grew to a stabbing pain, until in the third hour of my morning workout, it became so agonizing I couldn't put weight on it anymore. Defeated, I collapsed onto the floor. No longer in motion for the first time in what felt like weeks, I looked around my apartment and felt the heavy, anxious weight of that stillness. By that point, the book tour I'd been preparing for had been canceled. But that was no matter—the obsession had consumed the goal it had once been serving. I had written a book whose protagonist overcomes his insecurities to find peace and freedom, and now I was a hostage to the same monster I'd imagined my avatar besting on the page. With the world at war, here was my body—a battlefield that was just for me.

I wanted to stay in my bubble of self-obsession, which had become a kind of security blanket, much as I hated it, but I knew I couldn't any longer. Instead, I

called a friend I knew had been struggling. I didn't talk about myself or my problems. I just asked her how she was doing and listened to her answer. And doing that—getting out of myself—made me feel better, at least for a moment.

In the years I've been sober, I've found the hardest thing about recovery—not just from addiction, but from the trauma of being a person in the world—might be accepting that growth is not always linear. We move forward, and then, sometimes, we fall back. As a writer, I find this discomfiting: I want the clean, narratively resolute satisfaction of a happy ending. But when there is no end in sight, all we can do is try to cope, however imperfectly. "One day at a time" works for pandemics too.



*Lansky is the author of the novel Broken People, out June 9*

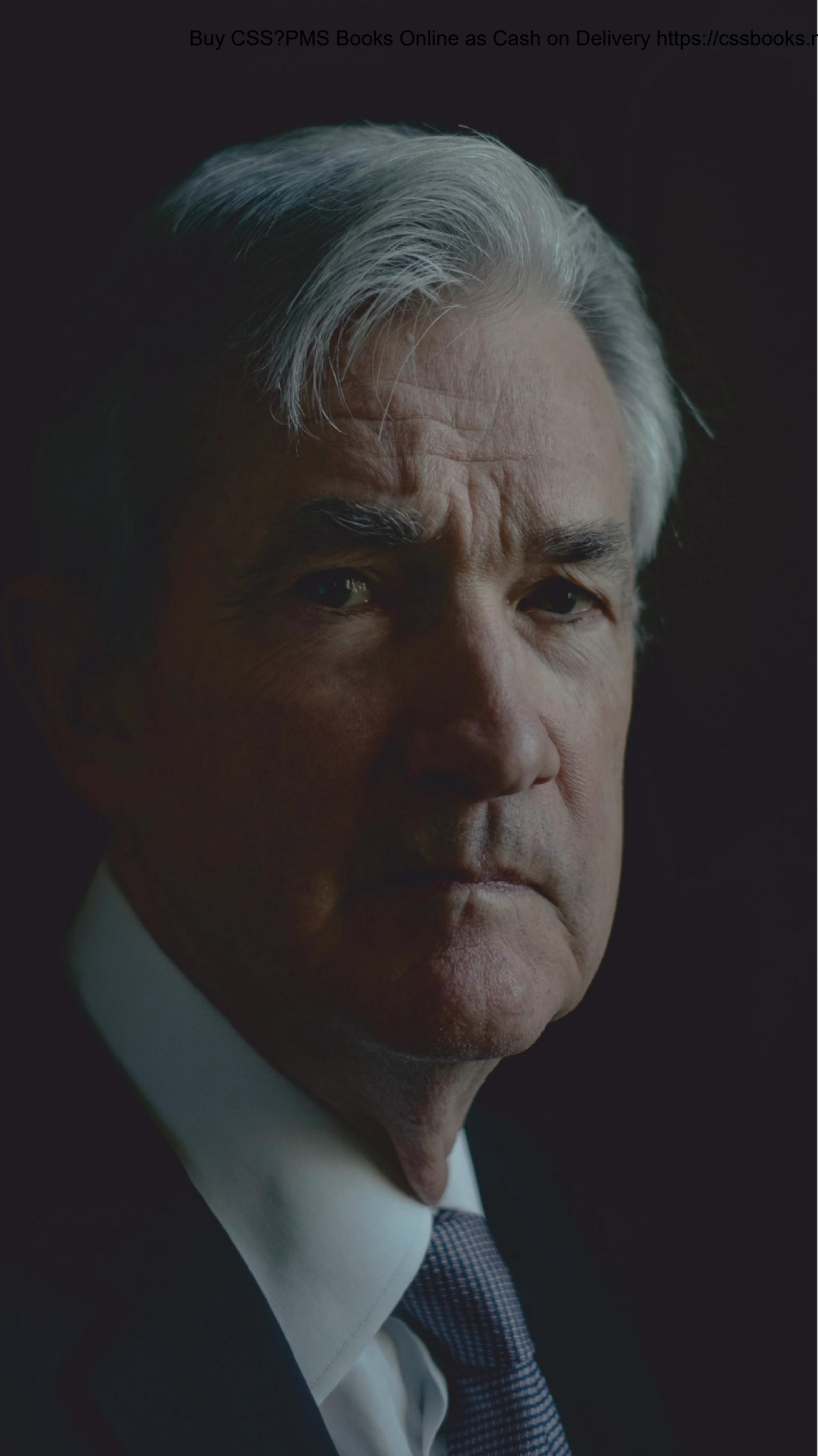
# Economy

# **T H E M O N E Y M A K E R**

**Jay Powell and the end of  
“normal” at the Federal Reserve**  
By Christopher Leonard

ON MARCH 11, A GROUP OF TRADERS INSIDE THE NEW YORK FEDERAL RESERVE Bank had the chance to watch, in real time, as financial markets spiraled downward. The market was in a panic that day. Stocks were down about 20% from their high in February, and the bottom didn't seem within view. As the novel coronavirus pandemic was starting to roll across the country, markets were trying to price in the near biblical damage it might cause. The traders inside the Fed had the unenviable job of trying to make sense out of the chaos. They met around a conference table, nursing their coffees, taking notes and speaking to their colleagues throughout the country. The New York team was the central bank's eyes and ears in the market, and their reports were grim. Even ultrasafe markets were seizing up. Buyers and sellers were having a hard time even determining a price for key assets. This was a crisis.

The information gathered in New York was ultimately passed on to Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome “Jay” Powell. Before the markets closed on March 11, Powell made a breathtaking announcement. The Fed was willing to print half a trillion dollars the following day, to provide short-term loans for distressed borrowers on Wall Street. The day after that, the Fed would offer another \$500 billion in the short-term loans (called repo loans) market. A trillion dollars, offered over two days, was the central-bank equivalent of a “shock and awe” campaign. There was



<  
*Powell in the  
boardroom at  
the Federal  
Reserve in  
Washington  
on May 13*

# Economy

every reason to believe this would work. The Fed's superpower rests on the simple fact that it is the only institution on earth that can create U.S. dollars out of thin air (that thing we call a "dollar" is, in fact, a Federal Reserve note). But on March 12, the Fed was outmatched by the coronavirus. Even a trillion dollars didn't soothe the nerves of traders. They worried that all the printed money in the world couldn't give people the courage to go back to Chipotle or the movie theater. Printed money couldn't keep open the businesses along Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. Markets continued to crash.

In the face of this panic, Powell and the Fed unrolled a second, even larger, wave of actions in late March and early April, pushing the central bank into new areas of the economy, expanding its reach dramatically and weaving it more tightly than ever into the fabric of American economic life. Now the Fed stands as the guarantor of huge swaths of the American and world economy. It's not a place where Powell expected to find himself.

"My views evolve with the evidence," Powell said to TIME in an interview in early May. The evidence before him these days is terrifying, and it has driven Powell's Fed to take actions that seemed unthinkable just months ago.

The coronavirus epidemic has, in a matter of months, wiped out roughly a decade's worth of job creation, destroying some 20 million positions as of late May and pushing the unemployment rate to its highest level since the Great Depression. The crisis has strained worldwide financial markets and corporations that were already saddled with record levels of debt. It caused a financial panic in March that wasn't fully appreciated at the time. The pandemic has shut down the U.S. economy with more speed and more force than perhaps any event in history. And everybody is looking to Powell to make it stop.

It is difficult to describe the Fed's interventions without sounding hyperbolic. The Fed has printed money at a scale that dwarfs all previous efforts. Just consider the Fed's balance sheet, a rough indicator of how much money the bank has printed. After the financial crash of 2008, for example, the Fed added \$1.4 trillion to its balance sheet over two years (a record-breaking increase at the time). This year, the Fed added \$2.9 trillion in less than three months. Back in 2007, the Fed's balance sheet was about 6% of the size of the entire national economy. By the end of this year, it is expected to be about 40%.

Back in 2010, the Fed launched the second round of a controversial stimulus program called quantitative easing (QE), under which it bought \$600 billion worth of U.S. debt over several months. In March, the Fed bought roughly \$543 billion in a week through similar programs. In 2015, the Fed's balance sheet hit \$4.5 trillion. Analysts expect it to hit roughly \$8 trillion or more by the end of this year. Perhaps most significantly, the Fed is now operating several programs in direct partnership with the U.S. Treasury by buying up corporate debt and small-business loans. These new programs are breaking down the walls of the Fed's jealously guarded independence. Just months ago, there was speculation that the Fed might



▲  
*Powell records a message on the COVID-19 pandemic in the studio at the Fed in May*

have run out of ammunition to combat an economic downturn, in part because it had kept interest rates so low for so long, but Powell's Fed has proved that in a time of crisis it is willing to launch new programs, expand its influence and take on ever greater risks.

**THE SPEED AND CHAOS** of the economic collapse during the pandemic has obscured the impact of the Fed's actions. Behind all the numbers and complex programs, the Fed is quite simply rewriting the rules of American capitalism. In just months, the bank increased the size of its footprint in the economy by more than two-thirds and proved to investors that it would step in to buy entirely new kinds of things that it had never bought before, like corporate junk debt and Main Street business loans. As often happens with the Fed, this is all presented under the rubric of crisis management, but history shows that the Fed's interventions are very difficult to withdraw once a crisis is over. The actions it took from 2008 to 2010, presented as temporary, remain largely in place. It is entirely plausible that the Fed will be grappling a decade from now to undo the emergency actions of today.

No one should know this better than Powell.



When he joined the Fed, he voiced concerns about the dangerous side effect of the past decade's emergency actions. He tried, unsuccessfully, to scale back some of these measures before the pandemic hit. Now he is overseeing the most far-reaching intervention in the Fed's history.

"I think it's unprecedented, even by the precedent of the financial crisis," says U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin about the role of the Fed. Powell and Mnuchin have been on the phone daily, sometimes dozens of times a day, Mnuchin confirms. Both Powell and Mnuchin have made clear that they stand ready to do more if the situation warrants it but stress that the emergency measures are temporary.

"These are emergency powers that we can only use with the Secretary of Treasury's permission" and under the law as written by Congress, Powell says. "And when that emergency is over, we're going to put those powers back away again."

But as the Fed continues to push further into

team believe that they have little choice but to do whatever they can to save as many jobs as possible.

"This is why the Fed was invented," says former Fed Chair Janet Yellen. "There was just a huge, broad-based flight from risky assets of every type. And that's like a modern-day bank run. The role of a central bank is to take risks and to avoid harm to the economy when no one else is willing to do so."

**WHEN HE FIRST ARRIVED** at the Fed in 2012, Powell seemed keen to challenge the status quo. Powell was nominated by President Barack Obama, who wanted to appoint a Republican to one of two empty seats on the board.

The Federal Reserve System is an institution that prizes consensus and civility. It is notable, then, that during one of Powell's first meetings as a Fed governor, he said things that were positively incendiary. This was back in January 2013.

At issue were the Fed's increasingly sweeping interventions in the economy. In 2008 and 2009, the Fed took emergency measures to keep credit flowing during a global financial panic. It took an even bigger role starting in late 2010. At that time, the financial crisis had largely passed, but overall growth was weak. European governments faced huge debt problems, and tepid growth threatened to derail the recovery. It seemed that there was little the Fed could do because interest rates were close to zero.

different corners of the economy, it is making it all the more difficult to ever get out—and that concerns economists and critics who wonder what this means for the economy in the future.

"Once you cross a line, it's really hard to go back," says Roberto Perli, a former senior economist at the Federal Reserve. "It will be really hard, maybe not in the next recession but in the next crisis, for the Fed to say: No."

Powell acknowledges this risk.

"The danger is that we get pulled into an area where we don't want to be, long-term," Powell says. "What I worry about is that some may want us to use those powers more frequently, rather than just in serious emergencies like this one clearly is."

The Fed's emergency actions have reshaped American capitalism, says Scott Miner, the chief investment officer of Guggenheim Investments, who advises the New York Federal Reserve Bank. "They have essentially told the world that there is now a backstop on corporate debt," Miner says. "By directly intervening, [the Fed] has established a precedent that will be impossible to reverse... We have now socialized credit risk. And we have forever changed the nature of how our economy functions." The private banking system will now have a new calculus as it makes loans: the price of a loan will also be based on the Fed's appetite to buy it.

If there is a single mantra that seems to be guiding Powell and the Federal Reserve leadership, it's that this Fed is on a war footing. Concerns about long-term consequences of today's actions must be put aside. In a situation like this, Powell and his

**'We have now socialized credit risk.'**

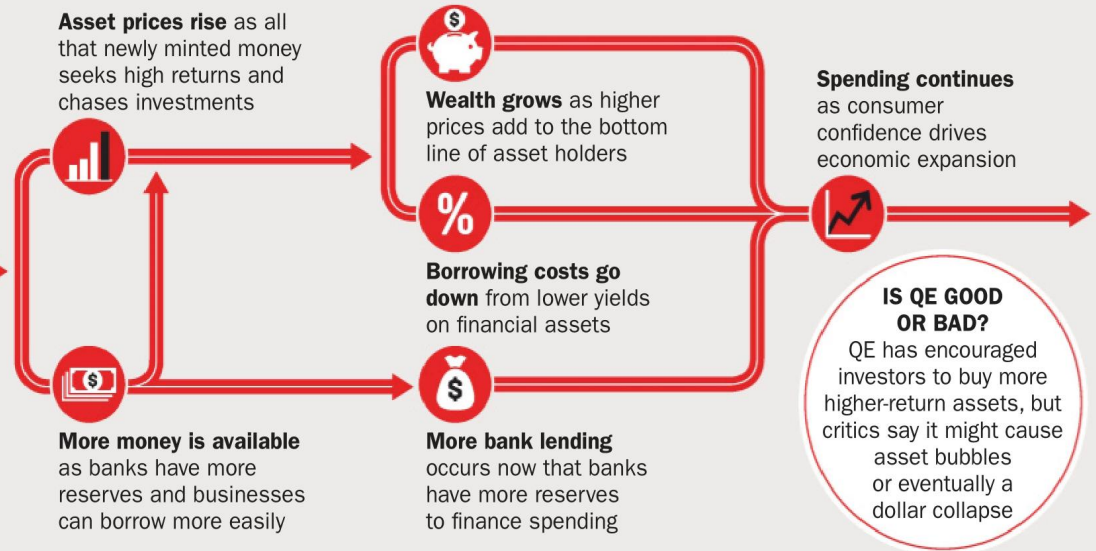
# Economy

## Tracking the Fed's moves

During the Great Recession in 2008, the Fed turned to quantitative easing (QE) to goose the economy. Here's the theory behind it



**Fed creates money** and uses it to buy assets from an exclusive group of financial institutions



The then Fed Chairman, Ben Bernanke, advocated a radical technique. The Fed could pump trillions of dollars into the banking system by purchasing certain kinds of assets from big banks. This was the quantitative-easing program, and the experiment appeared to pay off. Economic growth resumed. Some of that growth was inevitable. But supporters said the program helped by encouraging businesses to borrow money they used to hire workers and boost output. It also transformed financial markets.

Back in August 2008, before the stock market crashed, U.S. banks held about \$2 billion of excess cash in their reserve accounts at the Fed, an insignificant amount. By the end of 2012, the level of excess reserves had swelled to \$1.45 trillion, a historical anomaly by many factors of 10.

This meant that the days of the Fed simply trimming interest rates during a downturn, and raising them again during the upswing, were gone. Things were more complicated now. The Fed had injected hundreds of billions into the banking system while keeping interest rates near zero, which affected banks' behavior by encouraging them to lend rather than save. Many critics of QE pointed out that all this money created a desperate "search for yield," meaning that banks, pension funds and hedge funds needed to invest excess cash and were willing to invest in just about anything that yielded more than 1% or 2%. This search for yield was a classic recipe for creating asset bubbles.

This kind of bubble is exactly what Powell warned about back in early January 2013. He was something of an outsider at the time. Unlike many Fed officials, Powell is not an economist. He is a lawyer who has spent his career toggling between two worlds: government service and private-equity dealmaking. His experience gave him a firsthand view of how Fed interventions could distort credit markets, and he was worried about what he saw.

"While financial conditions are a net positive, there's also reason to be concerned about the growing market distortions created by our continuing asset purchases," Powell said, according to a transcript. "Many fixed-income securities are now trading well above fundamental value, and the eventual correction could be large and dynamic."

In Fed language, these could be considered fighting words. Powell was saying that the value of assets like fixed-income bonds was being inflated by quantitative easing. Amid pressure from Powell and other Fed governors

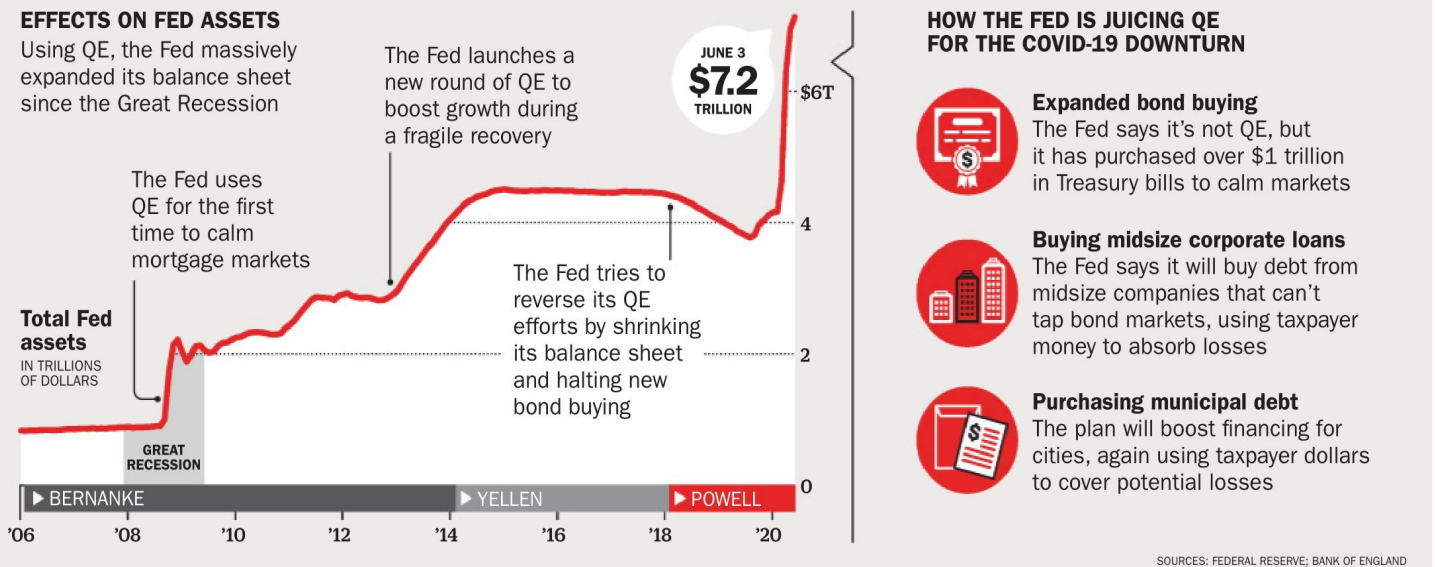
who worried about asset bubbles, Bernanke started to publicly signal that the Fed might scale back its QE asset purchases. Investors panicked and started dumping long-term Treasury bonds, fearing that the market would fall without the Fed making big purchases through QE. The Fed backed off, worried that its moves might wreak more havoc. This set a tricky pattern for the Fed.

**BERNANKE AND THEN HIS SUCCESSOR**, Yellen, and then her successor, Powell, have all tried to scale back the Fed's asset purchases, raise interest rates and reduce the size of the Fed's balance sheet, all with limited success. Every time the Fed tried to pull back, it caused volatility in the markets, threatening a downturn, putting pressure on the Fed to back off. Powell learned firsthand how difficult this process could be after President Donald Trump nominated him to be the Fed chairman in 2017.

In December 2018, Powell said during a press conference that the Fed was committed to reversing the process of QE by drawing down the Fed balance sheet.

"So we thought carefully about this, on how to normalize policy, and came to the view that we would effectively have the balance-sheet runoff on automatic pilot and use monetary policy, rate policy, to adjust to incoming data," Powell said during his public comments.

The "automatic pilot" part of that statement got Wall Street's attention. Powell was saying that the Fed was determined to reduce its footprint in financial markets. This did not go over well. The stock market started to crater, and the Dow Jones fell more than 600 points on Christmas Eve, a frightening event on a usually quiet day.



In light of the market turmoil, Powell essentially reversed course in January.

“As always, there is no preset path for policy,” he said during a public appearance. “And particularly with muted inflation readings that we’ve seen coming in, we will be patient as we watch to see how the economy evolves.”

Markets recovered. But the Fed had fundamentally committed itself to enduring intervention and money pumping, just to keep the financial system working.

This commitment became apparent in September of last year. That’s when a vital Wall Street loan market called the repurchasing agreement, or repo, market seized up. Repo loans are supposed to be cheap and safe. People borrow money in the repo market by putting up solid collateral, like Treasury bills, and getting cash in return. These loans might be as short-lived as a single day. At that time, the borrower swaps back the cash for Treasury bills, paying a tiny premium for the privilege. Repo markets allow investment houses to quickly turn their assets into cash, and they are the lifeblood of Wall Street.

But something went wrong with this market in September 2019. From Sept. 16 to Sept. 17, the cost of a repo loan spiked from the usual rate of about 2.5% to higher than 9%, a shocking level that caught traders and the Fed off guard.

It’s unclear what precisely caused this market seizure, but a few things are certain. The Fed’s effort to “normalize” its operations had drawn down

excess bank reserves to about \$1.4 trillion. This level of excess bank reserves was more than 100,000% higher than in the decades before 2008, but they weren’t high enough to keep the repo market going. Banks weren’t willing or able to extend repo loans. Most repo borrowers were “nonbank actors” like hedge funds, according to Bank of America analyst Ralph Axel. For some reason, banks were not willing to offer these hedge funds repo loans, even at exorbitant rates.

On Sept. 17, the New York Federal Reserve stepped in. It offered about \$75 billion and up to \$100 billion in nightly repo loans at below-market rates. This cheap credit allowed the hedge funds and nonbank actors to keep their doors open. The repo markets calmed. But in October, Powell announced that the Fed would purchase billions of dollars in assets like Treasury bills and mortgage-backed securities. In all, the Fed pumped about \$400 billion into financial markets. And this was during the good old days of January.

Powell might have argued over the years that the Fed should scale back some of its interventions. But Powell, and those who work with him, are emphatic that he is no ideologue. They say that he adjusted his views on the basis of the data. He operated much as he did back in the private-equity world, always measuring the performance of an enterprise against the verdicts of the marketplace and making adjustments when necessary.

On Feb. 11, Powell mentioned in public testimony to Congress that the Fed was monitoring reports of a novel coronavirus in China.

“We’ll be watching this carefully,” Powell said at the time.

**LIKE SO MANY PEOPLE** these days, Powell is working from home, dealing with the same hectic mix of conference-call meetings and video-conferences that millions of Americans do. On the desk in his home office, Powell keeps one thing handy for constant reference: key passages from the 2010 Dodd-Frank financial-reform act. The law laid out how the Fed can use its emergency lending powers during a crisis, in partnership with the U.S. Treasury. This has become Powell’s guidebook for surreal times.

The current wisdom inside the Fed points toward acting aggressively

## Cheap credit allowed the hedge funds to keep their doors open



# Economy

and quickly, according to former Fed senior economist Claudia Sahm. After the crash of 2008, the Fed formed an internal policy group to study its emergency responses in 2009 and to come up with “lessons learned.” Fed officials came to believe that the bank was too slow to respond to the housing bubble and then too slow to respond when the bubble burst.

“The lesson of the Great Recession is if you don’t move fast, if you don’t go big, you are going to have a mess,” Sahm says. “The best opportunity that you have to short-circuit a recession, and make it less severe, is right at the start.”

Powell seemed to take this lesson to heart. From March 3 to March 23, the Fed rolled out its playbook from 2009, just larger and faster than ever before. It slashed interest rates to zero. It offered \$500 billion in daily repo loans. It opened up so-called swap lines with foreign central banks, allowing those banks to trade their own currency for dollars at a stable rate. The Fed ramped up the quantitative-easing machine, essentially promising to buy an unlimited amount of Treasury bills until further notice. But these emergency measures weren’t enough to keep the markets from continuing to crash.

Minerd, the Guggenheim investor, says a panic erupted across financial markets during this time. The panic even overwhelmed the market for Treasury bills, arguably the foundation of the global economic system. Minerd and others watched in horror as the spread on Treasuries jumped to 4% over a matter of days in March. The price spread on riskier kinds of debt, like corporate bonds, hit 30%.

“That is unthinkable,” Minerd says.

This was the kind of flashing red signal that indicates a financial crisis. All around the world, investors dumped whatever securities and assets they owned in a desperate effort to raise cash. The widening bond spreads showed that there simply wasn’t enough cash to be had around the world. The Fed’s 2009 playbook wasn’t enough.

On March 23, the Fed introduced a new set of interventions, announcing three programs that dramatically expanded its reach into the economic landscape. Known as special purpose vehicles, or SPVs, these newly minted legal entities are joint ventures created with the Treasury that will live inside the Federal Reserve Bank. Using Fed and Treasury money, the SPVs will be used to buy up a variety of assets that the Fed had avoided purchasing before.

Corporate debt has been a particular concern. Companies like Ford Motor Co. and Kraft Heinz took on billions in debt when interest rates were low. When the coronavirus hit, their debt burdens became unmanageable. In March alone, about \$90 billion worth of investment-grade corporate debt was written down to junk-debt status, according to Deutsche Bank. This risked causing a cascading effect. As the debt of more companies was downgraded to junk, it might crowd out investors for billions of dollars in other junk-debt loans, causing them to falter or face default.

The Fed created two new SPVs to buy corporate debt and help short-circuit this process. As of April 9, the Treasury had put down \$75 billion between these two bond-buying SPVs. The taxpayer’s cash will act as the “first loss” money, meaning that if the bonds default, the losses will be paid with the Treasury money first. Another major SPV will buy loans that have been given to businesses with as many as 15,000 employees.

Subsidizing loans to companies that once relied only on the private banking system is a major departure for the Fed. Mnuchin says the effort is already paying off. “The day we jointly announced that transaction—



## The Fed has been picking winners and losers in debt markets

and the commitment to it—that unlocked the entire corporate bond market,” Mnuchin says. “So without having to actually invest a dollar of taxpayer money, the mere announcement of providing liquidity and a backstop unlocked unprecedented amounts of activity.”

Taken together, all of these programs have a single goal. The Fed and the Treasury are combining forces to purchase debt when the private market isn’t willing to do so. The Fed will print new dollars to do this, and the debt

will effectively reside on the Fed’s balance sheet. This is why the balance sheet is predicted to roughly double this year from about \$4.1 trillion before the crisis to \$8 trillion or more.

The rise of the SPVs will fuse the Fed and the Treasury in the most significant way since 1951, when the two agreed to an “accord” that established the Fed’s independence. Ever since it was founded, the Fed’s leaders have worried that if elected politicians got hold of the Fed’s money-printing power, they would simply run the presses whenever they faced election, eventually creating out-of-control inflation or asset bubbles.



**POWELL HAS FAMOUSLY GUARDED** this independence even as President Trump has made him a target of his Twitter rants, pressuring the Fed to cut interest rates and boost economic growth. Powell has stood firm that the Fed's job is to act independently, without regard to the next election. In 2014, when he was a Fed governor, Powell was invited to speak at the Brookings Institution, where scholars had proposed that the Fed coordinate its bond-buying program with the Treasury. Powell disagreed with that idea and called it "fraught with risk."

"I believe that monetary policy is—should be— independent, and that that independence is highly valuable to society," Powell said at the event. "I'm afraid that any active collaboration between debt management and monetary policy, even in a crisis, would risk calling into question that independence."

The Fed and the Treasury aren't working together to manage U.S. debt, but they are working together to flood debt markets with new money.

Powell insists today that the Fed will remain fiercely independent when it comes to setting monetary policy and launching programs like quantitative easing. "It's important that a democratically elected part of our government have some accountability, some responsibility, for these emergency measures that we take," he says. "Dodd-Frank said that the Secretary of Treasury has to approve all these policies. I think that's good policy, actually."

▲  
*Trump introduces Powell as his nominee for chairman of the Fed in 2017*

It seems unlikely that the Fed's new SPV programs will be the end of the bank's intervention. In a press conference on April 29, with the pandemic still spreading, Powell reiterated that the central bank will be on hand to intervene as needed.

"They aren't done," says Sahm, the former senior Fed economist. She notes that the Fed has a list of emergency measures waiting in the wings. The nuclear option, Sahm says, would be a thing called a money-financed fiscal program, known as "helicopter money," whereby the U.S. government issues debt, which the Fed immediately buys and holds permanently.

"It's essentially just the Fed printing money and paying for the relief," Sahm says.

Whether Powell will push the Fed past that threshold remains to be seen. It is clear that Powell will examine the economy's health with the same ideological flexibility he has demonstrated since he became chairman. The question is, How far is he willing to go? Powell has said there is a limit to the Fed's intervention. With the pandemic still raging worldwide, the next year may test just where that limit stands.

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*Leonard is the author of Kochland: The Secret History of Koch Industries and Corporate Power in America. Alexander Holt provided research for this story.*

# TIME

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# Time Off

**WHO'S LAUGHING?**  
In the era of pandemic  
and protests, what  
becomes of the big  
summer comedy?

**OAKLAND'S HISTORIC  
MOVIE PALACE**

**CLOSED  
WE WILL BE BACK!**

## INSIDE

VETERANS RETURN TO VIETNAM  
IN SPIKE LEE'S LATEST

PERRY MASON IS BACK,  
THIS TIME AS PRESTIGE TV

HOW THE PANDEMIC ERA HAS  
TRANSFORMED ACCESS TO ART

## TimeOff Reviews

## MOVIES

**Comedy in a time of tragedy**

By Stephanie Zacharek

WE'RE LIVING THROUGH A SERIOUSLY UNFUNNY POCKET OF history. Anger over police brutality and racial injustice has spurred radical action that's been a long time coming. A global pandemic has frozen us all in place, disproportionately harming or killing the vulnerable. People struggle to feed their families as unemployment soars. And we don't even have the promise of summer movies—particularly the mindless summer comedy, watched in the dark with a bunch of strangers—to help us forget ourselves for just an hour or two.

Can a comedy streamed into your home, and watched alone or perhaps with one or two other people, offer any solace right now? This summer will be the test, with upcoming comedies including a new Will Ferrell film, *Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga*; *Irresistible*, a political comedy written and directed by Jon Stewart; and *Palm Springs*, a rom-com in which Andy Samberg and Cristin Milioti play wedding attendees who get stuck together in a time loop.

The good news is that the first big comedy of the summer, *The King of Staten Island*, directed by Judd Apatow and starring Pete Davidson, is a potentially auspicious kickoff. Loose-jointed and openhearted, a wink of reassurance in our age of anxiety, it's that rare comedy that may actually play better in the living room than it does in the theater.

**DAVIDSON PLAYS SCOTT**, a 24-year-old Staten Island native who's frozen in perpetual adolescence, still living at home. An



**That's one of the benefits of comedy: in laughing at ourselves, we also look at ourselves**

aspiring tattoo artist, he hopes to open a combo tattoo parlor and restaurant called Ruby Tattoosdays, a spectacularly bad idea. He smokes so much weed that it no longer gets him high; smoking, he says, just makes him feel like himself. He has a friend-with-benefits who loves him—she's played, wonderfully, by Bel Powley—but he pushes her away. “There's something wrong with me,” he explains. Scott's father, a firefighter, died when he was 7, and when his mother (Marisa Tomei, effervescent as always) starts dating a new guy—also a firefighter—he acts out in crabby-toddler fashion.

It takes forever for anything to really happen in *The King of Staten Island*. But then, Apatow's pictures are often extended character sketches with plots tied to their tails, willy-nilly, almost like multiple TV episodes melded into movie form. (The script for this one was written by Apatow, Davidson and Dave Sirus, and is loosely based on Davidson's own life.) But Davidson—shuffling along in his long, baggy shorts and athletic slides with socks—carries *The King of Staten Island* ably on his stooped shoulders. With his broad, solemn mouth and exhausted raccoon eyes, he looks like a cartoon of himself, a sketch rendered in broad strokes and charcoal smudges. Scott is maddening, but we can see how he's his own worst enemy. To see him begin to kick out of his desperate loop releases some of our tension too.

That's one of the benefits of comedy: in laughing at ourselves, we also look at ourselves. What will comedy be like in the future, once we've processed all that has happened to us in this strange and unsettling time? Right now, everyone is very serious about the business at hand. But we all need to live in the world with our receptors open, which means someday we're going to have to laugh again. That's serious business too. Neglecting it for too long will be the death of us.

**THE KING OF STATEN ISLAND** is available to rent on June 12



Ferry tale: Powley, left, and Davidson feature as *Staten Island* locals



◀  
 “Bloods” was what African Americans called one another in Vietnam

If the others can’t wrap their brains around Paul’s politics, they can see how tortured he is. His son David (Jonathan Majors) has shown up on the trip uninvited, and their dynamic is tense. And Paul is haunted by a secret he shares with the group’s late squad leader, Norman (Chadwick Boseman), whom all of the men revered. He taught them to fight for what you want your country to become. Like all his comrades, Paul is entranced by the idea of that gold, but his quest is ultimately one of seeking clarity and forgiveness.

MOVIES

## The veteran experience, through Spike’s lens

THE VIETNAM WAR WASN’T THE FIRST WAR IN which black soldiers were funneled into combat by a country that had no other use for them, nor was it the last. But that war was notable for the way it raged even as black Americans at home were struggling for their own basic human rights—which means black soldiers were fighting not one war but two. That’s one of the ideas Spike Lee threads in *Da 5 Bloods*: four Vietnam vets reunite, in the present day, in the nation where they once fought for reasons that are still not clear to them. Their current mission is double: they’re determined to bring back the remains of their squad leader, killed in combat some 50 years earlier. And they seek to retrieve a cache of forgotten gold they’d stashed in the jungle before his death.

Otis (Clarke Peters), Eddie (Norm Lewis), Melvin (Isiah Whitlock Jr.) and Paul (Delroy Lindo) gather at a hotel in Ho Chi Minh City, greeting one another with wary affection. The bond between them is strong, though slightly frayed: their shared experience unites them, but their lives have scattered them in different directions. Paul has undergone the most radical change: he’s perpetually angry, suffering from PTSD for which he’s never been treated. And, to the surprise of the others, he’s a Trump supporter.

**Lee will never be satisfied with the status quo, and he reminds us we shouldn’t be either**

*DA 5 BLOODS* is an action film, a buddy movie and a drama about the conflicted relationship these men have with their country, a nation that asked them to fight and then slammed door after door in their faces upon their return. The picture has an ungainly shape, and certain dramatic notes don’t resonate with the boldness they need: when a tragedy strikes, the characters barely react. The story keeps moving like a freight train chugging along the track, and the effect is disorienting.

But even when Lee makes a flawed film, his spirit is a kind of braille, a code you can feel and see. Lee will never be satisfied with the status quo, and he reminds us we shouldn’t be either. *Da 5 Bloods* gets its energy from that jolt of defiance. Lee is a patriot at heart, and that’s always the most moving thing about his work. His connection to the past—not just to the past of black people, but to the painful past of black and white people coexisting, clashing and sometimes, blessedly, coming together—informs everything he does. He closes *Da 5 Bloods* with a quote from a speech Martin Luther King made the year before he died, in which King quotes Langston Hughes: “O, yes/ I say it plain/ America never was America to me/ And yet I swear this oath—America will be!” Those lines—wistful, even anguished, yet landing in optimism—could be Lee’s theme song. He pushes toward the future we deserve, if not necessarily the one we’ll get. We’re a mess—but o, yes, we will be. —s.z.

**DA 5 BLOODS** streams June 12 on Netflix

## TimeOff Reviews

## BOOKS

**Isolated—  
and obsessed**

By Annabel Gutterman

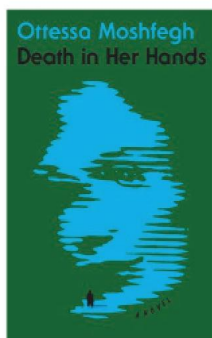
“IS MAGDA DEAD?” THE QUESTION HAS BEEN haunting 72-year-old Vesta Gul for hours. She’s just typed it in to a search engine on the computer at her local library. Unhelpfully, Ask Jeeves spits back over 600,000 web pages related to the query—but none are of any use to Vesta.

The widowed protagonist of Ottessa Moshfegh’s stirring new novel *Death in Her Hands* doesn’t know anyone named Magda. But on a recent walk in the woods by her home, Vesta happens upon a curious note that makes several declarations: a woman named Magda has been killed, the killer’s identity remains unknown, and the person who wrote the note did not kill her. The final sentence—“Here is her dead body”—is particularly shocking, because Vesta looks all over and there is no body to be seen.

This missive, which opens *Death in Her Hands*, propels Moshfegh’s isolated narrator along a darkly funny journey of self-reckoning. Vesta, who moved into a cabin at an old Girl Scout camp with her dog after the death of her husband, is no detective. Her obsessive and increasingly unreliable stream-of-consciousness narrative makes clear that she is both lonely and bored. She latches onto the mystery with every piece of herself, consumed with imagined scenarios of Magda’s murder. Vesta decides, for example, that the note’s author is named Blake: “The name was sneaky and a bit dumb, the kind of boy who would write, *It wasn’t me.*”

Almost all of *Death in Her Hands* unfolds in Vesta’s head as she attempts to understand what happened to Magda. Her voice, both strange and assertive, propels the narrative forward. And as her imagination conjures vivid characters and dialogue, it’s easy to slip into Vesta’s conception of reality—that these are all people who are real and have a stake in Magda’s death.

**THE PROTAGONIST** of Moshfegh’s third novel has a gloomy personality that mirrors those of the “unlikable” female characters the author of *Eileen* and *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* writes so well. Vesta is judgmental. She refuses to give the people around her a chance. When she reads the note that kicks off the novel, she is surprised that someone from her town could have written it: “The words themselves, when I spoke them aloud, seemed witty, a rare quality in Levant, where most people were blue collar and dull.” Initially, the general disdain Vesta feels and the isolation she’s secured



▲  
Moshfegh, top, wrote *Death in Her Hands* in 2015 and threw the draft in a drawer; three years later, she retrieved it

for herself harks back to the unnamed narrator of *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*. But unlike the young woman at the center of that book—which was a finely tuned portrait of privilege, self-loathing and pathological seclusion—Vesta is desperate for connection.

In a way, her plight echoes the anxieties and frustrations of life under stay-at-home orders. As many of us have wallowed in our own versions of isolation in recent months, time has blurred and loneliness has festered. At one point, Vesta makes a remark that could have been lifted from a COVID-19 quarantine diary: “Each day was like the day before, apart from the dwindling number of bagels, and the varying weather.” Her solitude, which the author captures with both empathy and humor, makes her susceptibility to obsessive thinking all the more believable.

Moshfegh clues her readers in early that this murder mystery may be neither murder nor mystery after all. But that’s ultimately beside the point. As Vesta gets lost in her own imagination, she reveals more about her identity, which she is only now beginning to understand: the heartbreaks of her upbringing, the controlling nature of her late husband and the expectations of life that have been unmet in her older age. Though *Death in Her Hands* can be studied for prescient insights into life in 2020, the stories that Vesta tells herself give it a timeless quality. Sometimes, there are healing powers in fantasy. □

## TELEVISION

**A Perry Mason for prestige TV**

The canonical Perry Mason is a man with few qualities—a brilliant defense attorney but a cipher. Raymond Burr's broad shoulders filled out the empty suit in the 1957 drama that made his sanguine character the ur-TV lawyer. In keeping with the current preference for darker heroes, HBO's update is a scrappy, scruffy drinker with baggage, played by Matthew Rhys of *The Americans*. Set in 1930s L.A., the show opens with Perry working as a low-rent PI. When an old attorney cohort (John Lithgow) enlists his aid in the case of a couple whose baby was murdered in sadistic fashion, the ensuing legal saga becomes an origin story.

Fans of the original's case-of-the-week format may not be the only viewers frustrated by the slow pace of the reboot. For those who aren't in a rush, however, there's lots to enjoy. Rhys leads a stellar cast—including Tatiana Maslany as an evangelist with ambiguous motives—in a solid noir that understands systemic oppression. Though it may not take place in a better world than the one we live in, stylish execution of genre tropes and lonely Edward Hopper visuals make the new *Perry Mason* an escapist treat. —Judy Berman

**PERRY MASON** premieres  
June 21 on HBO

*Maslany plays a holy roller with a captive audience*



Victor (Cimino, left) fails to make a strong first impression

## TELEVISION

**Love, Simon's new pen pal**

IN 2018, AS HARROWING ACCOUNTS OF anti-gay purges in Chechnya continued to make headlines, American television produced a sleeper hit of a romantic comedy about a closeted teen. *Love, Simon* follows a white boy (Nick Robinson) living in a wealthy, diverse suburb. Simon's parents are liberal. He has great friends. Yet he can't bring himself to come out. The movie crescendos to the top of a Ferris wheel, where two boys kiss as their classmates cheer.

The film was sweet but weirdly frictionless—a postscript to a history of struggle that wasn't over for everyone, a breezy teen romance framed as a profile in courage. *Love, Victor*, a spin-off series developed for Disney+, then moved to Hulu amid eyebrow-raising concerns over mature themes, tries to add conflict without losing *Simon's* innocence. Sophomore Victor Salazar (Michael Cimino) relocates to Simon's hometown from Texas with his religious Colombian-American family. Still questioning his sexuality and unsure how his loving yet casually homophobic parents might react if he turns out to be queer, Victor has real problems. If only the writers had also given him a real personality.

Though Simon has moved on to

college, his legend persists at Creekwood High, prompting Victor to reach out to him via social media for advice. (Robinson, a producer, appears mostly in encouraging voice-overs.) An instant basketball star who unwittingly attracts the most eligible girl in school (Rachel Naomi Hilson's Mia), Victor should be thrilled with his new life. He just can't stop thinking about his coffee-shop co-worker Benji (George Sear), an openly gay dreamer with excellent hair.

*Victor* has plenty going for it: the push-pull relationship between sensible Mia and her status-obsessed bestie Lake (Bebe Wood); funny guest stars like Ali Wong and Andy Richter; jokes guaranteed to make adults chuckle. It would be irresistible if it played up that wit, fleshed out its protagonist and explored the deeper implications of the Salazars' faith, instead of packing in schmaltzy moral-of-the-story moments. The show has already been renewed for a second season, and I'm hopeful it can get back on track. But first it has to decide whether to be blandly universal or culturally specific, *Full House* or *Sex Education*, Disney+ or Hulu. —J.B.

**LOVE, VICTOR** comes to Hulu on June 17



## TimeOff Art

## When gallery doors close, a window opens

By Anna Purna Kambhampaty

**T**HE TRADITIONAL ART GALLERY—THE sterile, windowless viewing room aptly labeled the “white cube” by artist and critic Brian O’Doherty in 1976—has dominated the art world for decades as the primary way to display works. But its eerie, clinical neutrality comes at a price. The cube creates something artificial about the way the viewer interacts with art, removing both from the outside world, and from anyone who doesn’t seek out or stumble upon that room.

Now the pandemic has made the gallery even more inaccessible, at least temporarily, inspiring curators and creators to reimagine how art might be shared. But while today’s circumstances are new, artists’ efforts to think beyond such restrictions are not. In the 1960s, members of the Fluxus movement created works that blurred the distinction between art and life, and denounced the gallery’s formalities. The land-art movement of the ’60s and ’70s saw artists sculpt the earth to create large-scale works, like Robert Smithson’s 1,500-ft.-long *Spiral Jetty* on Utah’s Great Salt Lake, that inherently held their creators’ anticommmercial politics: other than in photographs, there was no way for the massive pieces to exist within four walls.

From video games to snail mail, the examples on these pages are just a few of the ways artists and museums have seized upon this difficult moment to prove, yet again, that possibilities for interacting with art are as wide open as a room is closed.



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*The Getty’s Animal Crossing Art Generator tool allows players to import works from the museum’s open-access catalog*



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*B. Chehayeb’s abstract paintings on display in the miniature Shelter in Place Gallery*

### 1. A MINIATURE GALLERY

On March 27, artist Eben Haines launched Shelter in Place Gallery, a miniature display room that allows artists to create small-scale works that appear larger when photographed and shared on Instagram. After reviewing artists’ submissions of sample images and proposals over email, Haines and his partner Delaney Dameron ask the selected artists to drop off or mail them their work. Then they install and photograph each tiny solo art show, which lasts for less than a week.

“The fact that the space is miniature, and that the viewer understands that it is a fabrication, means that they end up looking closely at details: the masonry and the conduit and poorly placed outlets, the water stains where the skylight has leaked,” explains Haines.

For artists who don’t have access to their studios now, creating small works is far more feasible than what their usual work might entail. They’re “able to make more ambitious work than they could ever afford to at scale, let alone have shown in a commercial gallery,” says Haines, referencing the prohibitively high cost of real estate for urban galleries that might otherwise show more large-scale works.

Exhibited artists include B. Chehayeb (whose work is shown above), who makes paintings of abstracted memories of growing up Mexican American, as well as Mary Pedicini, who created a mixed-media room installation that hung from the beams. “Hopefully,” Haines says, “we allow people to make the work they’ve always wanted to make.”

### 2. VIDEO-GAME CURATION

In 2020, you can have your very own Claude Monet or Vincent van Gogh—or at least a pixelated version hanging above the stove in your virtual kitchen. With the Los Angeles-based Getty Museum’s Animal Crossing Art Generator tool, players of the highly popular Nintendo game—in which users design a whimsical island world while befriendng the animals that inhabit it—can search through the museum’s open-access collection and import images into their game. Then, players can display each work however they choose: on a wall; on a piece of clothing; or even in their own galleries, which friends who are also playing the game can visit virtually.

Bringing works of art into a video game and inserting them into a fictional world changes their contexts entirely, making them playful, moldable items. Players, in a sense, become curators. “It doesn’t just give users access to our collections, but it allows them to shape the museum experience for themselves,” says Selina Chang-Yi Zawacki, a software engineer at the Getty who developed the project. “In general, the typical museum experience is very rigid. It’s set up for you; there’s a flow you have to follow—but with this tool, you can make it whatever you want.”

Some users have chosen to print out the digitized versions of their chosen works, bringing the digital back into the physical world. The Art History Undergraduate Association at the University of California, Irvine, even used the tool to add works to a virtual art show honoring the opening of a canceled campus exhibition.

### 3. MAIL ART

The decades-old populist art practice commonly known as mail art or postal art has seen a revival in recent months. The rules are simple: all one has to do is make a small work of art of any kind (drawing, collage, poem, etc.) that can fit into an envelope and send it through the mail to another correspondent.

Dada artist Marcel Duchamp, Fluxus artist On Kawara and many others practiced the form in the late 20th century. The movement gained prominence in the 1950s, when Ray Johnson, who wanted to rebuke the gallery system, encouraged his network of acquaintances as well as strangers to share work through the mail. Johnson would send templates that had copies of his own drawings with prompts, like “Please add hair to Cher,” to correspondents, who would add their own mark to the mailings before returning them to him or forwarding them to someone else. The project eventually became known as the New York Correspondence School.

Since stay-at-home orders took effect, several mail-art projects have emerged. For one such project, Nashville-based art collector and curator Jason Brown has been holding an open call called “my view from home.” The initiative invites people everywhere to send in their works, which Brown collects and posts to the project’s website and Instagram account. After the submission period is over, Brown plans to donate the mailings to the Special Collections at Vanderbilt University Library in Nashville. According to Brown, he’s received more than 350 works from 27 countries, including India, Cuba and Germany. “It expands the notion of what an artist is. Mail

*More than 350 participants sent their works to Nashville for Brown’s “my view from home” mail-art project*



*‘All you need is your imagination and a stamp.’*

**JASON BROWN,**  
on a mail-art project he started under social-distancing orders

artists come from all walks of life; most are not professional artists,” says Brown. “All you need is your imagination and a stamp.”

### 4. “DRIVE-BY” EXHIBITS

Organized by Los Angeles-based conceptual artist and theorist Warren Neidich, “Drive-by-Art” is a unique blend of the physical and digital that creates a socially distant art experience. Aimed at bringing art back to its starting place, the artist’s studio—where Neidich believes the work is in its purest and most powerful state—his shows allow spectators to use an online map to drive past works displayed on artists’ lawns, porches and mailboxes from the safety of their cars. He came up with the idea after being sequestered in a cabin at the start of the pandemic; “Drive-by-Art” was his “reaction to feelings of isolation and disconnection.”

Neidich has already completed shows in L.A. and New York’s Long Island, and plans to expand to more cities and countries. Exhibits have included Jeremy Dennis’ “Destinations”; wood silhouettes covered in photocopied images of the Eiffel Tower; and Elvis’ meeting with President Nixon. Neidich worked with local artists and curators Renee Petropoulos, Michael Slenske and Anuradha Vikram to ensure a diverse range of both established and emerging voices for the expanded Los Angeles show. “I was using the car, which has many functions in the history of America, like the building of suburbia, and was trying to give it another meaning as a place of protection, a kind of solitary bubble through which you could experience art,” he explains.



*In a “Drive-by-Art” show in New York, Toni Ross and Sara Salaway exhibited When, a social-isolation “calendar” of jumbled chairs with date-related words*

# 6 Questions

**Spike Lee** The Oscar-winning filmmaker talks to MSNBC host Joy-Ann Reid about history, his new movie and the hope he finds in the protests

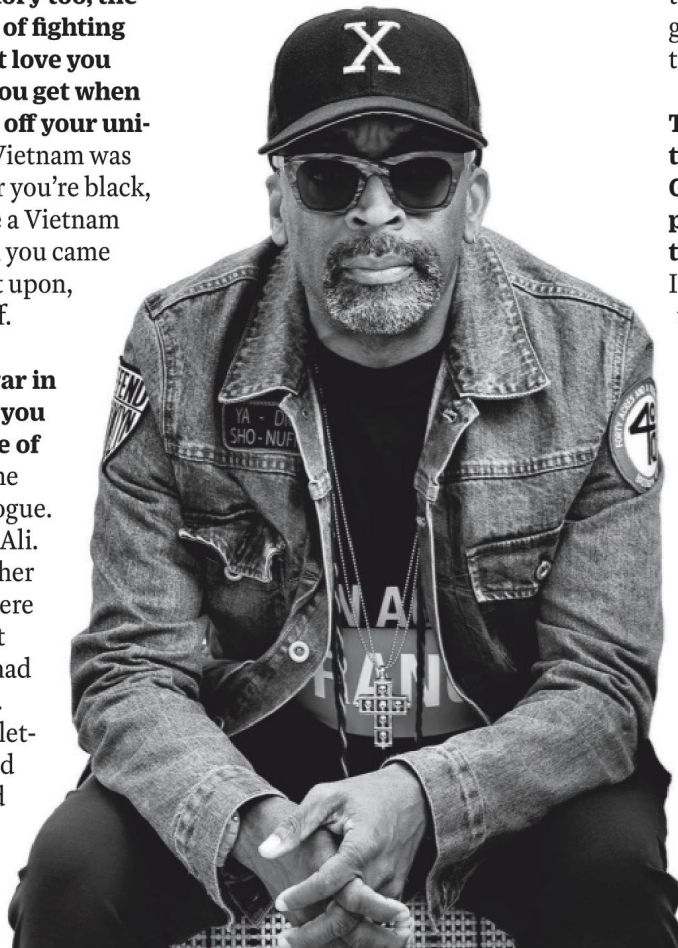
**A lot of your work feels like it's about the relationship of black people to America, and the extent to which violence is a critical part of that relationship. Is that an intentional thing?** I don't think that is intentional, but if you want to tell the story of who we are, just the fact that we were stolen from Mother Africa and brought here through the Middle Passage and no one knows how many people, our ancestors, didn't even make it. And now we're 401 years later, 1619, the first slave ship went to Virginia. So our entire existence from day one till today has been one of violence that is brought against us. And the more I think about it, we've got trauma. We as a people have trauma, and we don't deal with trauma.

**One of the things I do love about *Da 5 Bloods* is that that story too, the story of trauma, the idea of fighting for a country that doesn't love you and where the rewards you get when you come home and take off your uniform is police brutality.** Vietnam was very particular. So whether you're black, white or brown, and you're a Vietnam vet, you got hated on when you came back because I mean—spat upon, “baby killer”—all that stuff.

**But it was also the first war in American history where you actually had a black voice of dissent that was loud?** The film is a prologue and epilogue. A prologue is Muhammad Ali. Epilogue is Dr. Martin Luther King. Both of these guys were out against the war when it was not popular. Muhammad Ali got stripped of his title. Lost prime years of his athleticism. Dr. King got shunned by LBJ when MLK stepped out against the war.

**Do you put yourself in your films, and if**

**‘I THOUGHT OF ERIC GARNER, WHICH LED ME TO RADIO RAHEEM, WHICH LED ME TO MICHAEL STEWART’**



**so, which of these guys are the most like you?** None. The Vietnam War was the first war that was televised into American living rooms. So a lot of these memories I put in the film. I remember sitting on my stoop in Brooklyn, and I hear a voice, a woman's voice, screaming hysterical. And it's my mother. She's screaming bloody murder. No pun intended. “They killed Dr. King! They killed Dr. King! Those MF-ers killed Dr. King!” I remember it like it was yesterday. I remember watching the news that night and seeing 120 cities in America in flames.

**Do you feel like we are reliving that period that you just described?** Yes, yes, yes, yes. That's what makes me hopeful. Because these young white brothers and sisters. They've taken to the streets. And saying no to the stuff their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents before that have told them. You're not born a racist.

**This film I think was particularly timely because we're dealing with George Floyd. When that killing happened, when you saw that death on tape, what went through your mind?** I thought of Eric Garner, which led me to Radio Raheem, a fictional character in *Do the Right Thing*. Which led me to Michael Stewart, who Radio's murder was based upon. And then after that, all the other black people who have—then our brother in Georgia. Our sister in Louisville, Breonna. And I'm not trying to be funny or making a flip statement: I can't keep up with the names.

**Do you believe with all that you've seen is black liberation ultimately possible in America?** Well, the struggle continues. We're going to keep fighting for it until we get it.

Watch the full *TIME* 100 Talks interview at [time.com/spike-talks](https://time.com/spike-talks)

*I wish to train  
with astronauts*

**Addison, 8**  
Wilms tumor

WHERE THERE'S A *wish* THERE'S A WAY.

*For children battling a critical illness, a wish is more than a dream. It can be a turning point that can give them the emotional and physical strength to keep going.*

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# HOME

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