

Is a United World Possible?



By [Robert C. Koehler](#) | [Common Dreams](#)

What if . . . ?

I get lost—tangled in doubt and cynicism—when I try to pose the question in a more specific way. What if . . . a collective human voice could be heard, crying out across the borders as the pandemic surges, as the fires rage, as the planet’s life-sustaining climate collapses: “We are one”?

What if nationalism’s time has come and gone?

[Open Democracy](#) put the matter thus: “As the COVID-19 pandemic intensifies around the world, we are witnessing countries making unprecedented decisions to close borders to non-citizens. And as days pass, national borders have become more visible and less permeable than ever.”

Nations wall themselves off, bureaucratically and militarily, in order to protect “their” citizens from a global pandemic that knows no borders. The United States, of course, is one such nation presuming to protect itself—mostly from desperate migrants fleeing hell in their home countries. Sorry, guys. As Kamela Harris told Guatemalans two months ago: “[Do not come.](#)”

Indeed the U.S., being the most powerful and wealthiest nation on the planet—not to mention a significant contributor to the shattered homelands so many global refugees are forced to flee—is leading the way in avoiding the questions that cannot be avoided: How do we deal with a global pandemic? How do we address a collapsing environmental infrastructure? How do we reorganize ourselves globally to acknowledge that all life is connected?

In the words of Arundhati Roy, quoted by my friend Laura Hassler in the 2020 annual report of [Musicians Without Borders](#): “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.”

Are you listening, President Biden, et al? Roy adds:

“We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks, and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

Many immigrant-rights groups have been deeply critical of the Biden administration for its border policies, which basically remain stuck in the dead ideas of the past, such as maintaining what is known as Title 42 authority of the Center for Disease Control. This authority, seized in the wake of the pandemic by the Trump administration as a convenient way to close the southern border, allows the government to circumvent

both national and international law and expel immigrants at the border with immediacy and without due process.

The justification is the administration's need to "protect the public," which is simply a way to hide behind old-school nationalism: The only public that matters is the American public. The world's poor and desperate are on their own.

The San Antonio-based Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services, which has joined numerous other organizations in a suit against the government over its use of Title 42 at the border, pointed out, as quoted by [Common Dreams](#): "Forcefully expelling migrants without due process does not protect public health, and it won't slow the spread of the Delta variant when hundreds of families, many with small children, are huddled together at ports of entry."

There are several deep, painful ironies present in the U.S. border policies. One of them is that the racist legacy of the Trump presidency's closed-border obsession involves the myth that refugees are bringing diseases across the sacred border, one of several ways they are dehumanized for political purposes. They're criminals! They're terrorists! They're disease carriers! The irony is that this myth is sold primarily to the nation's Trump supporters, who in large numbers deny the existence of the coronavirus or at least refuse to be vaccinated. But when it comes to refugees, the virus is alive and well and out to get us.

A second irony involves the racist beliefs and connections of Trump advisor Stephen Miller, who worked hard to find ways to keep the southern border closed. As the [New York Times](#) pointed out, Miller had a long history of links to white-nationalist organizations, including one called [VDARE](#), which trafficked in the myth of "white genocide" or "the great replacement": that nonwhites want to rid the planet of white people. A particular subset of Americans apparently lives in fear that this is for real.

The irony here is what I would call “what goes around comes around.” That’s pretty much how white people—i.e., Europeans—acted when they colonized much of Planet Earth. Just ask the native inhabitants of North America, whose population was reduced, by war and illness, to a sliver of what it had been prior to the arrival of Columbus. I guess you need to stock up on guns and ammo if you sense that karma is coming for you.

A third irony is the most painful. It amounts to this: Many of this country’s essential workers—those on the front line during the pandemic, a.k.a., national heroes, whose low-paying jobs are crucial for society to keep functioning, for Americans to get the services they need—are immigrants, many of them undocumented.

Politics as usual will not help us walk through the door that the pandemic has opened. I understand that facing the unknown is no simple task, politically or otherwise. But far too many of the certainties embedded in American politics have, I fear, racist roots. The Biden administration has made significant promises to transcend all this—“the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred”—but can it do so beyond the campaign trail, in the here and now?

This is a question that has to be thrown open to the whole country. How does Planet Earth connect with itself? How do we create a human community that isn’t separated from itself by its own borders? Is it possible?

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[Robert C. Koehler](#)

[Robert Koehler](#) is an award-winning, Chicago-based journalist and nationally syndicated writer. His book, "[Courage Grows Strong at the Wound](#)" (2016). Contact him or visit his website at commonwonders.com.