

We Interrupt This Pandemic... With Demands for Justice and Healing



A mural showing the portrait of George Floyd in Mauerpark in Berlin. The death of George Floyd while in the custody of Minneapolis police has sparked protests across the United States, as well as demonstrations of solidarity in many countries around the world. (Photo source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

By [Randall Amster](#) | [Common Dreams](#)

Remember the coronavirus? It dominated the news for three months, redefined every aspect of our daily lives, and killed over a hundred thousand in the US alone. It also further exposed the venality and the insanity of our current Administration, making this reality-show presidency seem even

more surreal than it already had been. Long after immunities and vaccines have quelled the acute surge, people will still tell stories about the quarantine period(s), marking it as a generationally significant societal event.

But it turns out there are more pressing issues that have defined our politics and societies for centuries. Like a pandemic, these issues are punctuated by acute moments and spikes of fear; unlike a pandemic, they aren't triggered by external conditions and microscopic occurrences. Rather, these are the things we do to ourselves, initiated and instantiated by human cultures, infusing our systems of governance and structures of power at the macroscopic scale. These core issues aren't pandemic—they're endemic.

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We've tried to fashion names for these things: structural racism, police violence, economic inequality. Yet because they are endemic, naming them as such can make these issues appear compartmentalized, leading to calls for reforming particular sectors or remediating specific acts of abhorrent behavior. What feels different right now—prompted by the confluence of a pandemic, economic downturn, and yet another wave of horrific racial homicides—is an intensifying sense that the entire system itself is sick.

The uprisings and unrest in the wake of George Floyd's murder have centered race issues in the discourse while tapping into an array of related crises. It seems as if there is an implicit recognition of the ways in which we are interconnected—again, perhaps spurred by months of pandemic lockdown—and how famous aphorisms like King's "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" accurately describe our world. On some level we are all George Floyd, we all can't breathe, and we all want justice.

Still, the deeper reality is that some of us are more like George Floyd and more impacted by the forces that killed him. Even in a pandemic that seems indiscriminate in terms of the lack of a viral intention, the negative impacts skew strongly toward individuals and communities that are already marginalized in our system. Preexisting factors of poor health, substandard housing, lower wages, environmental toxins, limited services, and policies of social and spatial containment have shaped rates of infection and death.

Maybe in some manner beyond mere quantification, the virus has further illuminated the ways in which we're all at risk but how those risks are starkly distributed across society. Perhaps a few months of joint vulnerability and the realization of how precariously intertwined our lives are did something to change the equation in people's minds. It could be that widespread economic effects have sparked renewed insight about how many of us are one crisis away from being on the wrong end of the meritocratic myth.

Or maybe it's even simpler: months of social distance have made people long for getting back to their lives, only to be immediately confronted with an unvarnished reminder that "business as usual" includes racism, violence, and structural injustice. The call to "reopen" society isn't just about stores and bars; it's about reopening ourselves to the reality of a system that is built on racism, violence, and injustice. One can be victimized by this, or perpetuate it, or be complacent about it—or a combination of all the above.

Either way, this is the system that sustains us, and we're all part of it. Life is filled with moments for choosing when to accommodate and when to resist when to "go along to get along" and when to refuse to do so. It's not an exact science or a totalizing litmus test, and the different ways people are situated influence how we meet such moments. In the larger scheme, though, looms the recognition of common purpose and social solidarity. And that may well be the most newsworthy

and impactful revelation of all.



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