

## The Crises We Face

*By Nathaniel Roberts*

Collectively, we realized the threat we faced. There were mass shutdowns. People began changing their everyday behavior. The skeptics quickly shifted their rhetoric. It was no longer a hoax, or “not a big deal,” it was an emergency. Others, including our so-called leaders, added in layers of racist and xenophobic language to scapegoat- “this is *their* fault.” Congress proposed and debated proposals we couldn’t have fathomed in our polarized political paradigm. World governments took drastic actions, actions that were warranted, actions that met the challenge and reality of the situation.

Before the emergency declarations, a subset of us were worried. We discussed among our circles “why are we continuing as normal?” We watched it worsen and worsen. It hit other countries first, but it wasn’t ours, so many of us weren’t concerned. “It won’t affect *us*.” We believed we were somehow above nature. The smaller subset felt the water boiling. Even before the politicians did. Why weren’t we angrier? “People will die. Needlessly! *We* know it’s a problem, why don’t our leaders? Why aren’t they acting?” It wouldn’t be until we hit certain thresholds that actions would be taken. For many it’d be too late. Unfortunately that *many* are mostly communities of color and lower income groups. Their fate was written on the wall, already enshrined into destiny by factors since out of our control. We knew it was coming, we knew their communities would be most hurt, yet we didn’t act soon enough.

If we could condense climate change into a similar timeframe, I would imagine it would look very similar to our current reality. The bright side is that on both fronts, we still have time to act justly. The dark side is that it appears our acting will only help us to avoid the worst consequences. But, the difference in our actions is the difference in millions of lives. The difference is in how many will suffer, how many will lose everything, and how many will die.

There will be, and there already is, hurt, for both these issues. But there is opportunity. This current pandemic is offering us a way to reflect on our current state of politics. (To be clear, it should have never taken this much to do so). Reflect on the deep gaps in how we view our own community. The deep gaps in our social welfare systems. The deep gaps between white people and people of color.

We are seeing those gaps play out in real time. Chelsea, home to a large hispanic and latino community, has the highest coronavirus rate in the state at 1890 cases per 10,000 residents, matching par with New York City’s curve. It is also home to a massive share of essential workers. These are no coincidences. (Please donate to help their relief efforts here: <https://unitedwaymassbay.org/covid-19/local-funds/chelsea/>) We have also seen these gaps play

out historically and in terms of climate change. More than 3000 Americans died because of Hurricane Maria. Puerto Rico never received adequate aid. In both cases, we hardly hear about the devastation these communities have felt, are feeling, and will feel.

Moving more broadly: on healthcare, we must realize the absurdity of tying this necessity to employment. We must understand that the ability for undocumented people in our country to receive healthcare is about everyone's health. We must realize that prohibitive costs are not just economic malfeasance, but a public health malfeasance- if one person can't get tested because they are worried about costs, it is a risk to all our health.

On minimum wage earners and blue collar jobs, we must realize that their jobs are now, in this pandemic, what we consider essential. If they are essential now, why don't they deserve a living wage? Why wouldn't anyone deserve a living wage? Before now, in what we considered our normal everyday lives, we ignored the convenience of fast food, restaurant, and grocery workers, we ignored the benefit of their labor to our everyday lives. Now these workers are at constantly higher risk of contracting this virus.

On those who lost their jobs and those who will lose their jobs or those who cannot work, why now would they not deserve the same respect and rights as before. Do they not still need healthcare? Do they not still need to eat? Do they still not need housing?

COVID-19 has ripped open these gaps in a way we might not have been able to collectively realize before. It would be a disservice to not center the most vulnerable in our response to this pandemic. It would be a disservice to forget about these people once this pandemic is over. And as our economy hemorrhages and we develop a fix, we must put them first, not powerful mega-corporations that have abused the public trust so often in the past.

Fortunately, there is a vision that does just that: A Green New Deal. As we recognize the horrors of the way our society is currently built, who we've let fall through those gaps, we must look to rebuild our society with a vision of equity, and do it in a sustainable way.

To move on from this pandemic while forgetting the level of global urgency, to forget the problems that already existed that were only exacerbated, to forget the level of ineptitude at our government's highest ranks, to forget the calm before the storm where we could've acted and prevented, but didn't, and instead heard only downplaying and scapegoating, to forget that we are *all a community*, will lead to disaster.

If we do not apply any of these lessons to our response to the climate crisis; if we do not consider the problems of today and tomorrow in our response to the impending economic depression; if we do not mobilize at the same level as World War 2 and we do not pass a Green New Deal,

with the input of the most vulnerable and affected at the center, at this pivotal moment in human history, we will miss a generational opportunity- possibly our last opportunity.

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