The apocalypse is a common narrative that people have relied on to process shocking events. “Death on the Pale Horse,” by Benjamin West, from 1796.

Faithful Seek Signs in Crisis

By ELIZABETH DIAS

Shamain Webster, who lives in Texas, has seen the signs of a coming apocalypse for a while now, just as the Bible foretold.

But Ms. Webster, 42 and an evangelical Christian, is unafraid. She has been listening online to one of her favorite preachers, who has called the coronavirus pandemic a “divine reset.”

“These kinds of moments really get you to re-evaluate everything,” she said. As everyone goes through a period of isolation, she added, God is using it for good, “to teach us and train us on how to live life better.”

For people of many faiths, and even none at all, it can feel lately like the end of the world is near: Not only is there a plague, but hundreds of billions of locusts are swarming East Africa. Wildfires have ravaged Australia. But the story of apocalypse is one of the oldest humans tell. In ancient religious traditions beyond Christianity — including Judaism, Islam and Buddhism — it is a common narrative that arises in moments of social and political crisis, as people try to process shocking events.

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In Chaos, Autocrats Confront a New Foe

By DECLAN WALSH

CAIRO — When the virus hit, the strongmen hit back as they know best.

For Egypt’s president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, that meant deploying chemical warfare troops in protective suits, armed with disinfectant, to the streets of Cairo, in a display of military muscle projected via social media.

Russia’s leader, Vladimir V. Putin, donned the plastic suit himself for a visit to a Moscow hospital for coronavirus patients. Then he dispatched to Italy 15 military planes filled with medical supplies and emblazoned with the slogan “From Russia with Love.”

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey locked up reporters who criticized his early efforts to counter the virus, then sent a voice message to the phone of every citizen over 50, stressing that he had everything under control.

And in Turkmenistan, where not a single infection has been officially reported, the president for life, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, promoted his book on medicinal plants as a possible solution.

The world’s autocrats are employing a mixture of propaganda, repression and ostentatious shows of strength to exude an aura of control over a chaotic situation. The crisis offers them an opportunity to entrench their vast powers with little risk of censure from a distracted world, where the scramble to contain the pandemic has forced even liberal democracies to consider harsh measures.

“Coronavirus is the new terrorism,” said Kenneth Roth, head of Human Rights Watch, who fears that a sweeping expansion of draconian powers could become the virus’s enduring legacy. “It’s the

continued on Page II
Unlike Its Neighbors, Finland Is Prepared

By CHRISTINA ANDERSON and HENRIK PRYSER LIBLE

STOCKHOLM — As some nations scramble to find protective gear to fight the coronavirus pandemic, Finland is sitting on an enviable stockpile of personal protective equipment like surgical masks, putting it ahead of less-prepared Nordic neighbors. The stockpile, considered one of Europe’s best and built up over years, includes not only medical supplies, but also oil, grains, agricultural tools and raw materials to make ammunition. Norway, Sweden and Denmark had also amassed large stockpiles of medical and military equipment, fuel and food during the Cold War era. Later, most all but abandoned those stockpiles. But not Finland. Its preparedness has cast a spotlight on national stockpiles and exposed the vulnerability of other Nordic nations.

When the pandemic hit, the Finnish government tapped into its supply of medical equipment for the first time since World War II. “Finland is the prepper nation of the Nordics, always ready for a major catastrophe or a World War III,” said Magnus Hakenstad, a scholar at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies.

Though year after year Finland has ranked high on the list of happiest nations, its location and historical lessons have taught the nation of 5.5 million to prepare for the worst, said Toni Loumenna, the chief executive of Finland’s National Emergency Supply Agency. “It’s in the Finnish people’s DNA to be prepared,” Mr. Loumenna said, referring to his country’s proximity to Russia, its eastern neighbor. (Finland fought off a Soviet invasion in 1939.) In addition, most of its trade goes through the Baltic Sea. That, he said, is a vulnerability.

There is little publicly available information on the number of supplies that Finland has or where exactly they are stored.

The authorities confirmed that the stockpiles are kept in facilities spread across the country and that the current system has been in place since the 1950s. That has placed Finland in a more solid position to confront the pandemic.

As officials in other countries like the United States lamented the shortage of masks, ventilators and gowns and the global coronavirus cases raced out of control, Finland was and is abundantly stocked with PPE. Nations are competing for medical supplies and racing to create a vaccine.

The European Commission, the executive branch of the European Union, announced on March 19 that it was creating its first ever stockpile of medical equipment “to help EU countries in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.”

Several E.U. countries have already passed new legislation banning the export of essential materials. When the medical device company Mölnlycke Health Care in Sweden tried to send masks and rubber gloves to desperate hospitals in Italy and Spain from its storage center in Lyon, France, it was blocked by France’s export ban.

On April 4, however, Sweden’s foreign minister, Ann Linde, said on Twitter that after pressure from Sweden, France had finally relented on the masks from Mölnlycke. It was “very important that the internal market works even in times of crisis!” she said.

Norway used to be more resilient and equipped to be self-sustaining in a national crisis, according to Leif Inge Magnussen, associate professor of leadership at the University of Southeastern Norway. But a risk analysis last year by the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection conclud ed that pandemics and medicine shortages were key concerns.

“Society has become very dependent on other countries and just-in-time supply chains,” Mr. Magnussen said.

“Every year the celebration of Passover, on April 8 and reckons 10 plagues from the Book of Exodus, is a reminder of God’s redemption,” Dr. Ekemini said. “A.D. Blades of grass become like swords — and even the sense of shared external evil can be misinterpreted as a symptom of Covid-19.”

In Buddhist traditions, apocalypse comes as a result of collective karma — everyone’s actions toward one another and the world — which means its not a single event, that can change, even in the present circumstance. “It’s like a warning to change the course of actions, to bring back compassion, empathy, develop social equality,” Dr. Wallace said.

A stark, binary structure — a clear good and evil — appears when society is fractured, Dr. Hidalgo said, adding, “A sense of shared external evil can usually bring folks together.”

The memory of past crises can offer hope — that humans have survived such moments before, and that the truths being revealed can be a call to action.

“Is this the end of the world? Maybe it is, maybe it isn’t,” said Ekemini Uwan, a public theologian. “But we need to be ready. We need to learn to number our days because we really do not know when our last breath will be.”

THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL WEEKLY

WORLD TRENDS

Russian officials blamed infections on jet-setters returning from Europe. At Red Square.

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THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL WEEKLY
Afghan Crisis, Met With Kindness and Waived Rents

This article is by Mujib Mashal, Assadullah Timory and Najim Rahim.

KABUL, Afghanistan — Around the time his hometown turned into the epicenter of coronavirus in Afghanistan and the government began a lockdown, Mohamed Kareem Tawain, an 80-year-old dentist in the city of Herat, had set off for the bazaar. He took some money from his wife to distribute for charity, but found no one on the streets to give to.

“When I came to the clinic the next morning and interpreted my dream, I knew it had a direct connection to the coronavirus,” Mr. Tawain said. “I decided I would waive the rent for the 10 shops I own,” which comes to about $5,000.

The virus is spreading across Afghanistan at a time when the country is grappling with a raging war with the Taliban, an election dispute that has split the government and brought a $1 billion aid reduction from the United States as punishment, and a dire economy with half the population impoverished.

In such a moment of need, ordinary Afghans have stepped up to share the little that they have, tapping into a culture of generosity, volunteerism and care within the community that many feared had been eroded by decades of war, greed and corruption.

Across Afghanistan, landlords have waived rent. Tailors have offered masks. A 108-year-old dentist in the city of Herat, said he waived the rent on 10 shops he owns. Left, activists handing out masks, gloves and hand sanitizer in Kabul last month.

Polluted French Region Fights Industry

By ADAM NOSSITER

FOS-SUR-MER, France — The line of giant chimneys stretches to the horizon in one of the most polluted industrial zones in Europe.

For years, the inhabitants of Fos-sur-Mer accepted their illnesses — for example, a cancer rate that is double the national average — in exchange for jobs in the nearly 200 factories, warehouses, gas terminals and industrial sheds that surround them.

But enough got to be enough. Citizens in this corner of the Mediterranean, just west of Marseille, took their fight to a place rarely used in France to resolve such disputes: the country’s justice system.

They have banded together to file a criminal complaint accusing the steel, oil and petrochemical companies in the area of putting their lives at risk. It is a first in France: citizens taking on a region’s industry in court, and threatening criminal sanctions.

Sylvie Anane, who lives within breathing distance of the plants, has suffered debilitating illnesses: heart problems requiring a stent, ovarian cancer, diabetes, thyroid cancer, breast cancer and two heart attacks. “For a long time, nobody talked about the pollution,” said Ms. Anane, one of those who brought the complaint. “It was a bit of a taboo. The idea was that it gave us work.”

The citizens have taken on not just the government, but an entire industrial basin: all of the Mediterranean coast’s steel and petrochemicals, producing 15% of France’s power, 15% of the country’s emissions, all of its leaded gasoline and 20% of its steel.

Factories near Marseille are blamed for cancer rates.

With the effort began, four companies, including ArcelorMittal and a fuel refinery belonging to Esso, part of Exxon Mobil, have also been targeted in a lawsuit.

Exxon Mobil has described the Esso refinery as a “responsible actor” in regards to the environment. ArcelorMittal, a steel-making giant, has argued that it has spent tens of millions of euros on pollution-reducing equipment. Activists say the effort was not enough.

“Their strategy has been to pull out when the police are around,” said Julie Andreu, the lawyer who filed the complaint last month. “They made the people rich. And then, little by little, the pathologies developed.”

Health care professionals say the number of cancer cases is well above normal. In her neighborhood of 62 homes, there have been cancer victims in 22 of them, said Jackie Huriaux, a retired nurse.

“The citizens know that the factories are an essential part of the area’s economic life and that the air quality will never be perfect. But it could be better, they’re sure, if the plants adopted more pollution-reducing methods.

“We need the jobs,” Ms. Anane said. “But we need to be healthy to work.”

That conundrum is not lost on the crowd at the Bar du Commerce in the center of Fos. The customers who gathered there recently, before the coronavirus shut down social life, had just come from the industrial zone. “Sure, we’re for these lawsuits,” said Bruno Thieulent, a dockworker. “But then, you’ve got to think about the work. If there’s no pollution, there’s no work. Besides, we’ve always lived with it. It’s just been part of our lives, that’s all.”

BRINGING FOOD TO THE POOR AND SOAP TO PASSERS-BY.

Mohamed Kareem Tawain, 80, a dentist in Herat, said he waived the rent on 10 shops that he owns. Left, activists handing out masks, gloves and hand sanitizer in Kabul last month.

THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL WEEKLY
President Donald J. Trump said recently that he hadn’t “heard about testing positive for Covid-19” but right now — let’s face it — tests are being rationed in many parts of the United States.

Of course, the seriously ill and essential front-line personnel like doctors, nurses and policemen require and deserve to go to the front line of the line for testing.

But there are hundreds of thousands of people who should have been tested at this point, if more tests were available. Testing them would have vastly changed their behavior, their self-care at home, and our understanding of Covid-19, so that it flares locally we would know how to respond in a more nuanced way, rather than shutting society down. After this initial list, rarely added to, would be a long list of people who are “presumed Covid.” None of them were tested, because they were not sick enough to be admitted to a hospital — though all were symptomatic.

Here’s a partial list:

Three 20-something roommates in New York, two with mild symptoms, were not enough to visit a hospital, short of breath. No tests. All were told: “Assume you have it.”

Also “presumed Covid”: a college student whose daughter and her boyfriend, though he had a rough two weeks, is better.

There are concerns, to be sure, about the accuracy of the new tests, with reports of false negatives. That is no reason not to use what is available; the specific source of false negatives can improve with understanding and use. It would be wise for people who test negative to continue rigorously following good Covid hygiene. But it would be a mistake to not expand testing because of reports of false negatives.

“Presumed positive” may be needed during a period of rationing and shortage. But “Assume you’re positive,” as so many New Yorkers are doing, is not good individual health care — or good policy.

A few years ago, when some pictures by Times photographers adorning our office walls were swapped out for others, I found one headed for the garbage.

It captured the scene when Andy Card, a top White House official, whispered to George W. Bush, as he read “The Pet Goat” book. I thought that was very nice of the president.

A reporter in San Francisco, who went to a clinic with high fever, total body aches and cough. “Assume you have Covid,” she was told. She was sent home. The next day her strep test came back positive.

It is true that a positive Covid test would not have changed any of their immediate medical treatment. Not knowing likely didn’t increase their risk of death. So, I don’t fault the doctors for not administering tests to them at a time of limited resources.

What is outrageous: This resource should not be in such limited supply unless it is a global outbreak. Widespread testing is hugely important for individuals and society.

If people knew they’d had Covid, and therefore possessed at least some immunity, they could volunteer, once fully recovered, for groups like Meals on Wheels, which is struggling to deliver food to people who can’t fend for themselves. They could serve as helpers in nursing homes, whose staffs are stretched thin and in where the elderly are isolated.

Knowing the result of a test allows rational individual decisions. If people living with others know whether they have Covid versus a common cold, it impacts how they interact with family and housemates. If Covid positive, it makes sense for the sick person to totally isolate in one room and use a separate bathroom. An elderly relative might be moved out. If a common cold, less disruptive precautions are needed.

We test for things like strep and sexually transmitted diseases not just because knowing test results influences treatment, but also because the results influence the care and advice for patients’ activities and contacts.

Widespread testing of all those “presumed-Covid” patients who are not hospitalized gives us a far clearer picture of this new viral disease.

It would allow us to calculate how many people who are infected with the virus get really ill and how many die (the true case fatality rate). We are now or less clueless about those things, and because of uneven testing, fatality rates vary widely from city to city, state to state and country to country.

Finally, widespread testing would allow us to have a better sense of how transmissible the virus is after more casual contact. Long after his graduate school classes were canceled, my son was belatedly notified that one person in his German class had fallen ill with Covid-19. How many others did, but were never tested?

After this period of lockdown, Covid-19 is likely to come back in lesser waves, and robust testing data would be hugely important in fashioning a targeted response that could be less expansive than the miserable and economically devastating shutdown we are now experiencing. If one student falls ill in a class, should universities again send all students home and cancel a semester — or close a building. Or just cancel one class?

Thank goodness that countries like South Korea are doing far more testing than the United States is. But America should be doing much more itself.

There have been countless explanations for the lack of tests. Public health labs are not primed to do testing and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was slow to react to a virus many knew was likely to come our way. The agency initially distributed test kits like Senate seats — equal to each state lab, rather than where they were most needed.

In 2017, Kushner worked as an emergency room physician before becoming a journalist. She is editor-in-chief of Kaiser Health News. Send comments to intelligence@nytimes.com.

Elisabeth Rosenthal worked as an emergency room physician before becoming a journalist. She is editor-in-chief of Kaiser Health News. Send comments to intelligence@nytimes.com.

 Without Tests, We Are Flying Blind

MAUREEN DOWD

Leading From the Rear

MAUREEN DOWD

Where’s our Mideast peace deal, dude? Surely Trump did not think giving Kushner a lead role would inspire confidence. This is the very same adviser who told his father-in-law early on that the virus was being overplayed by the press and also urged him to tout a Google website guiding people to testing sites — a project that turned out to be still under construction.

Now he is leading a group, mocked within the government as “the Slim Suit crowd,” that is providing one more layer of confusion to the disorganized response.

From the lection, Kushner drilled down on his role as the annoying, spoiled kid. “And the notion of the federal stockpile was, it’s supposed to be our stockpile,” he said. “It’s not supposed to be the states’ stockpiles that they then use.”

Our stockpile? That is the way the Trump-Kushner dynasty has approached this whole virus outbreak, conflating what belongs to the people with what is theirs. Trump acts like he has the right to dole out “favors,” based on which governor is most assiduous about kissing up to him.

On April 3, the administration changed the wording on the Department of Health and Human Services website about the stockpile to be matchy-matchy with Kushner’s cavalier dismissal of the states.

It was typical of Trump’s maddened message that also on April 3, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued new guidelines to wear masks, the president said: “You can wear ‘em. You don’t have to wear ‘em,” adding he had no intention of wearing one because “Somehow, sitting in the Oval Office behind that beautiful Resolute desk, the great Resolute desk, I think wearing a face mask did not gel with his image of playing boss: Jared Kushner.

The Food and Drug Administration only belatedly allowed private and university labs to contribute without the normal regulatory tape. There was a shortage of swabs and a shortage of personal protective equipment for people taking the swabs. Most recently, an Abbott quick test device that Trump had applauded as a solution turned out to be only 5,500 tests, distributed nationally. Yet millions were needed.

There are concerns, to be sure, about the accuracy of the new tests, with reports of false negatives. But that is no reason not to use what is available; the specificity of newly developed tests can improve with understanding and use. It would be wise for people who test negative to continue rigorously following good Covid hygiene. But it would be a mistake to not expand testing because of reports of false negatives.

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Then the first test kits didn’t work.

Sans tests, America’s do.

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Pandemic Reveals Economy’s Frailties

When convulsive economic events happen, the implications can take years to play out, and spiral in unpredictable directions. Who would have thought that a crisis that began with mortgage defaults in American suburbs in 2007 would lead to a fiscal crisis in Greece in 2010? Or that a stock market crash in New York in 1929 would contribute to the rise of fascists in Europe in the 1930s?

The world economy is an infinitely complicated web of interconnections. We each have a series of direct economic relationships we can see: the stores we buy from, the employer that pays our salary, the bank that makes us a home loan. But once you get two or three levels out, it’s really impossible to know with any confidence how those connections work.

And that, in turn, shows what is unnerving about the economic calamity accompanying the spread of the novel coronavirus. “As much as I hope we are able to get ordinary economic activity back up, that’s just the beginning of our problem,” said Adam Tooze, a historian at Columbia University and author of “Crashed,” a study of the extensive global ripple effects of the 2008 financial crisis.

“This is a period of radical uncertainty, an order of magnitude greater than anything we’ve ever seen,” said Tooze, in an interview last month.

It would be foolish to make predictions about how the world economic order will look in five years, or even in five months. But one lesson of these episodes of economic tumult is that those surprising ripples — and the implications can take years to play out, and spiral in unpredictable directions. Crises bring to the fore imgages easy to ignore in good times.

One obvious candidate is globalization, which has been under attack for years but was dealt another blow by the pandemic. The same questions are being asked around the world. Other countries like Iceland and South Korea have tested broadly for infections, or combined testing with digital tracking to undercut the spread of the virus. In hard-hit Italy, antibody tests — and the potential of “immunity licenses” — have lingered over a national debate over how and when to reopen the country. Regional presidents have turned to antibody tests as a way to better chart infections but also to get a sense of which workers might have the desired antibodies to possibly provide protection and return to work.

But even the best laid plans can go awry.

Scientists are checking blood samples from 3,000 random Munich households for antibodies in a yearlong study.

By KATRIN BENNHOLD

BERLIN — Felix Germann was not expecting anyone when his doorbell rang. Outside was a doctor who looked like she had just stepped out of an operating theater, green scrubs, face mask and all — and a policeman.

The visitors had come with an unusual proposal: Would he allow them to test his blood for Covid-19 antibodies? Every month? For a year? Starting next week? He would be helping to further the science that would ultimately allow for a controlled lifting of social and economic restrictions in the country and save lives.

“Of course I said yes,” said Mr. Germann, a 41-year-old project manager at a media company. “I want to help. This is a collective crisis. The government is doing what it can. Everyone needs to do their bit.”

With that, Mr. Germann and his girlfriend joined 3,000 households chosen at random in Munich for an ambitious study whose central aim is to understand how many people — even those with no symptoms — have already had the coronavirus, a key variable to make decisions about public life in a pandemic.

The study is part of an aggressive approach to combat the virus in a comprehensice way that has made Germany a leader among Western nations figuring out how to control the contagion while returning to something resembling normal life.

Other nations are still struggling to test for infections. But Germany is doing that and more. It is aiming to sample the entire population for antibodies in coming months, hoping to gain valuable insight into how deeply the virus has penetrated the society at large, how deadly it really is, and whether immunity might be developing.

The government hopes to use the findings to unravel a riddle that will allow Germany to move securely into the next phase of the pandemic. Which of the far-reaching social and economic restrictions that have slowed the virus are most effective and which can be safely lifted?

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SGP BY KATRIN BENNHOLD

The global pandemic revealed weaknesses in far-flung supply chains. A container ship in China.
Russian Censorship Is Unable to Silence Coronavirus

By ANDREW HIGGINS

MOSCOW — The remote northeastern Russian region of Komi is a coronavirus petri dish for the horrors of the world’s largest country.

Amid growing evidence that the pathogen had already breached Komi’s feeble defenses, the local authorities moved recently to contain the crisis: The police summoned critics of the government to ask how they knew about an outbreak in a hospital at a time when officials in Komi were insisting nobody had been infected.

Among those called in for questioning was Pavel Andreev, the director of Komi’s independent online journal that revealed last month how a surgeon in a Komi state hospital sick with Covid-19 had infected patients.

Mr. Andreev said the police officer who led the interrogation wanted to know about a comment the media director had posted online that said, “It is impossible to trust the state, even in hospitals.”

The police intervention was carried out at the behest of Komi’s health minister, who was fired recently for his mishandling of the pandemic. It highlights one of Russia’s biggest obstacles as it struggles to control the spread of the virus in its vast hinterland: a lumbering bureaucratic machine geared to protecting officials, even after they lose their jobs, not safeguarding the public.

Losing sight of the true scale of the disease is key to fine-tuning the loosening of restrictions and minimizing income loss and social isolation, scientists say.

Some results have come out. In Gangelt, a small town of about 12,000 in northwest Germany, tests of a first group of 500 residents found that 14 percent had antibodies to the virus. Another 2 percent tested positive for the coronavirus, raising hopes that about 15 percent of the local population may already have some degree of immunity.

“The process toward reaching herd immunity has begun,” said Hendrik Streeck, director of the Institute of Virology at the University Hospital Bonn, who is leading the study. The Munich study is expected to be more nuanced in its findings because it follows participants like Mr. Germann for a whole year. In addition to blood tests, there will be questions about mental health and income loss.

“Rather than giving a yes or no answer, you would have a spectrum of possible outcomes,” Mr. Streeck said.

Scientists in Munich are tracking residents for a year. In addition to doing blood tests, they will ask questions about mental health and income loss. Frozen blood samples.

With Tests, Germany Seeks Normalcy

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“We are at a crossroads,” Mr. Hoelscher said. “Are we going to the route of loosening more and increasing immunity in the summer to slow the spread of this in the winter and gain more freedom to live public life? Or are we going to try to minimize transmissions until we have a vaccine?”

“This is a question for politicians, not for scientists,” he added. “But politicians need the data to make an informed risk assessment.”

Six days after they first rang his doorbell, a doctor and two medical students came back to Mr. Germann’s apartment. They put on disposable protection suits, gloves and goggles, and one of them took a small vial of his blood. Then they removed and bagged his used disinfectant cloth. It will be put to its highest use. The idea of the world economic superpower (America then, China now) would companies be willing to sacrifice quarter-to-quarter earnings for resilience over the long term, whether that’s natural disasters, the climate crisis, pandemics or other shocks?”

Susan Lund, a partner at McKinsey & Company. “To what extent would companies be willing to sacrifice quarter-to-quarter efficiency for resilience over the long term, whether that’s natural disasters, the climate crisis, pandemics or other shocks?”

She envisioned not so much a full-scale retreat from global trade as a shift toward regional trade blocs and greater emphasis on having companies build redundancy into their supply networks.

In a past de-globalization — the unwinding of global commerce that took place amid World War I and the 1918 flu epidemic — there was also a remaking of the global financial system, with the British pound losing its pre-eminence. Signs point the other way: toward the dollar’s becoming even more entrenched at the center of the global financial system.

European officials have been reluctant to take steps that would make the euro more central to the world currency system. And China has been reluctant to remake its financial system in ways that would allow the renminbi to become crucial to world commerce.

At times over the last 12 years, it has felt as if the world were reliving the period of 1918 to 1919, but with the events out of order. That era had a global financial collapse; a rise of authoritarianism; the emergence of a new economic superpower (America then, China now); and a pandemic.

One thing seems clear: History can occur when you don’t know how it ends.
**Migrants Carrying The Virus Deported**

By CAITLIN DICKERSON and KIRK SEMPLE

In the scramble to contain the spread of Covid-19 in the United States, the Trump administration continues its aggressive immigration enforcement agenda, deporting thousands of people to their home countries, even those who are sick with the virus.

Dozens of Guatemalans flown home by United States immigration officials since late March tested positive for the coronavirus after returning, according to Guatemalan authorities. And deportations of children who arrived at the border without adult guardians have risen sharply following stepped-up restrictions at the border adopted during the pandemic.

Last month, President Donald J. Trump sealed the southwestern border, saying the move was necessary to prevent migrants from carrying the coronavirus into the United States. But few, if any, people with the disease have crossed the border from Mexico, and Guatemalan authorities have now accused the United States, which has the most coronavirus cases in the world, of sending infected people back across the borders.

Deportations to Honduras and El Salvador have also continued, despite the concerns of migrants, advocates and some government officials in Central America. Those countries, like neighboring Guatemala, are beset by poverty and weak public health systems, making them particularly vulnerable.

Nic Wirtz contributed reporting.

A border ban and a speedy removal of minors and others.

To the impacts of the pandemic.

In March, American immigration officials completed 17,965 removals, according to agency records. Total deportations have declined so far in April, however, with 2,985 removals of foreign nationals from all countries.

Officials said they were suspending removals to Guatemala pending an investigation of that country’s claims.

A total of 95 minors traveling without their parents were deported to Guatemala in March, up from 16 in January, according to the Guatemalan government. A total of 92 were deported to Guatemala during the first half of April.

The speedy removal of unaccompanied children represents a significant change from previous practice, under which minors designated as “unaccompanied minors” were taken to shelters operated by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and given a chance to apply for asylum in America. Before the pandemic, such young people were only deported after a lengthy legal process in which they were given access to social workers and, in some cases, government-funded lawyers.

Advocates said the shift puts the children at risk of kidnapping or other exploitation.

“When you send kids back without any precautions, without any screening, you create a situation in which traffickers, smugglers and people who want to take advantage of them are literally waiting for them in these border towns,” said Michelle Brané, a migrant rights director at the Woman’s Refugee Commission.

The issue of deportees being returned to Guatemala is sensitive as the country attempts to contain its own outbreak. The authorities have evaluated the health of deportees arriving at the airport in Guatemala City to screen for possible infection. Those who have a higher-than-normal temperature or other potential symptoms are whisked to a special hospital, officials said.

Recently, President Alejandro Giammattei of Guatemala said that a suspension of deportation flights would continue until the United States was able to assure Guatemala that deportees were being returned virus free.

American Immigration officials said they were doing a “visual screening” of deportees and checking temperatures before boarding flights.

Guatemalan officials reported more than 380 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the country and 11 deaths as of April 24. The tally includes people who were returned from the United States on deportation flights in recent weeks.

There is evidence that Guatemalans may be growing increasingly suspicious of returning migrants for fear they may be importing infection.

Mr. Giammattei said that several community councils in Zacataltenango, a city in the western highlands of the country, had planned to burn down a government building where 80 deportees were being quarantined.

Guatemala’s health minister, Hugo Monroy, said American deportation flights were aggravating the outbreak in Guatemala by returning people already infected with the virus.

The United States, Dr. Monroy said, “has practically become the Wuhan of America.”

**In State of Emergency, Last Call Is 8 P.M.**

By MOTORDI RICH

TOkyo — It was a scene of normalcy, something friends in New York or London can only conjure in memory: a man and a woman, out for a drink.

Tokyo had already been in a coronavirus state of emergency for several weeks. But through the windows of a narrow restaurant in Roppongi, a nightlife neighborhood in Tokyo, I could see them sipping from beer steins, chatting in non-social distancing proximity.

Several others waited, face masks pulled down under their chins, while cooks served up battered octopus balls.

Nobody was breaking any laws: Even Japan’s new state of emergency was created not only to request that people stay home and that businesses close. The Tokyo governor has asked people to refrain from going out at night, but said restaurants and bars may stay open until 8 p.m., prompting jokes about the virus’s nocturnal habits.

Tokyo is a place where people follow rules. They wait for green lights to cross streets. In subway stations, they board escalators single file.

But there is always room for subversion. On my route to work, I pass an alley book-ended by “no smoking” signs, always crowded with smokers. Tokyo’s cacophonous (and alcohol-soaked) nightlife caters to employees seeking an escape from days conforming to Japan’s hierarchical work culture.

Even with the virus, people don’t relinquish these outlets easily.

Some social distancing is also built into the culture. We bow rather than shake hands. Hugging is rare. And while the Western world debated whether face masks were needed, Japanese did what came naturally. Long before the virus, especially during winter flu seasons, Tokyo’s trains were filled with faces shielded behind white masks.

That may partly explain why this city has seemed seduced by magical thinking, presuming we are immune when so many others around the world are not.

Even a member of Parliament refused to do what was being asked; he was kicked out of his political party when he admitted he visited a so-called hostess bar in Tokyo after the state of emergency was declared.

Some of the “resistance,” if you will, is rooted in the work culture, where employees fear they will be deemed slackers if they don’t show up to work.

Japan had 11,135 infections and 263 deaths as of April 21. As Tokyo tries to hang on to some sense of itself, it feels like people are trying to thread a needle they cannot see.

The government says residents need to reduce human contact by 80 percent to flatten the curve. Yet it seems too many people are trying to squeeze into the 20 percent.

At home in our living room, we periodically hear loudspeaker messages booming over our neighborhood. “Please refrain from going outside,” we are told. I wonder if enough people are listening.
The Age of Coddling Has Come to an End

Over the past decades, a tide of “safetyism” has crept over American society. As Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt put it in their book “The Coddling of the American Mind,” this is the idea that “if something ever does not kill you makes you weaker. The goal is to eliminate any hardship a child might encounter, so he or she will not be wounded by it.” This coddling is everywhere — and sometimes harder to spot than ever.

Hard and is sometimes harder is forgiving, science departments have become more lenient. “Fifteen years ago, a student with A’s, science de- grates mean that academic honesty is impossible to do anymore,” wrote Julian in “The Anxious Mind,” “is the idea that failure is to be avoided at all costs.”

Meanwhile schools inflate grades. Since 2005 the average grade point average in affluent high schools has risen to about 3.0 from 2.75 so everybody can feel affirmed. This overprotective impulse does not shelter people from fear; it makes them unprepared to deal with the fear that inevitably comes. Suicide rates are skyrocketing, especially for girls.

Medical students in protective gear prepared to screen patients for the coronavirus in Las Vegas in March. The virus is another reminder that hardship is woven into existence. The pandemic exorcises the tide of “safetyism,” raising our young. I am hoping it means that hardship.

Protests are the logical conclusion of a twisted concept.

Professor McKenzie at the University of Texas at Austin led a team that found that “[t]he spontaneous flowering of good ideas seems impos- sible to avoid getting infected.” The death of George Floyd was a national tragedy, a loss that it is impossible to do anything about. The death of a child is a personal tragedy, a loss that it is impossible to do anything about.

The virus seems to do whatever it wants. “We put our full minds and whole hearts into trying to save them. Then I see their bod- ies shut down anyway. They are alone.” Wearing the same masks as those whose training spared them hardship but in those whose training embraced hardship.

He has earned the trust of a non-trivial number of Americans, and used it to stoke his ego and his bank account. And he never lets reality get in the way (in case of point, holding a stay-at-home order protest in Texas the day after the state announced it would be efforts to carefully reopen in coming weeks).

Former employees have de- scribed Mr. Jones as a master of manipulating the truth into a worldview in which Infowars and its listeners are constantly victimized. Charlie Warzel is a New York Times Opinion writer. Send comments to intelligence@nytimes.com.