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NATION DOWN

THE YEAR OF AMERICAN CRISES

EDITOR'S NOTE

BLUEPRINT
A magazine of research, policy, Los Angeles and California

AMERICA HAS CHANGED, three times over, since the beginning of 2020. When the coronavirus swept across the world at the beginning of the year, it spared no place; it did not observe travel bans or national boundaries. Only hygiene and distancing slowed its destructive swath, and the United States haltingly and unevenly accepted those realities. By fall, this nation was suffering from COVID-19 more acutely than any other developed country, and the death toll pushed past 200,000, nearly four times as many Americans as died in Vietnam.

That calamity gave rise to a second: the collapse of the American economy. Gross domestic product plummeted by more than 30% in the second quarter. Millions of jobs were lost; countless businesses shuttered, many forever.

And then, amid fear of disease and the realities of unemployment and stress, the nation revisited its most difficult and unfinished debate: race relations. Spurred by the killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police on May 25, Americans yet again gazed in fury at one more video of officers pressing their force against a Black man, in this case pinning his neck to the pavement with a knee as he pleaded for help. "I can't breathe!" became the cry of a renewed call for racial justice; and protests, overwhelmingly peaceful though occasionally violent, erupted across the country.

America has weathered many crises. It has fought wars, including a Civil War, and faced ravaging epidemics and economic disruptions. It is not true that the country has never been more divided, or that these challenges are unprecedented. But they are intensely demanding, nonetheless. Rarely, if ever, have three such urgent traumas arrived together — and in an election year, no less.

This issue of Blueprint examines how these events are affecting Americans and values they consider very important — their families, communities, shelter, safety and politics. How do we help one another in a time of division and uncertainty? How do we safeguard children who are at risk, unable to protect themselves, sometimes from their own parents, when normal access to help is shut down? How do we select leaders when human interaction in politics is limited, beginning to end: from rallies to the polls? And how do we fend off danger when those charged with securing our safety — the police — are no longer trusted by many whose lives they are responsible for defending?

These are fraught times, days when the pillars of society seem unable to support much of what it means to be an American. As the Democratic and Republican national conventions played out this summer, it was difficult to believe that both were addressed to the same America, so divergent were their views of our country.

Yet the fundamentals — family and community, a place to live and a job to do — transcend party and ideology. They give meaning not just to America but to life itself. Such values must survive, no matter the condition of the Republic or who leads it. Managing our crises, explored in this issue of Blueprint — our 12th and biggest ever — is centered around the exploration and preservation of our values, both at UCLA and beyond. That is noble work, and badly needed.

JIM NEWTON
Editor-in-chief

INSIDE BLUEPRINT

ISSUE #12 / FALL 2020

LANDSCAPE

PROFILE

INFOGRAPHICS

FEATURED RESEARCH

SPECIAL REPORT – A CLOSER LOOK

TABLE TALK

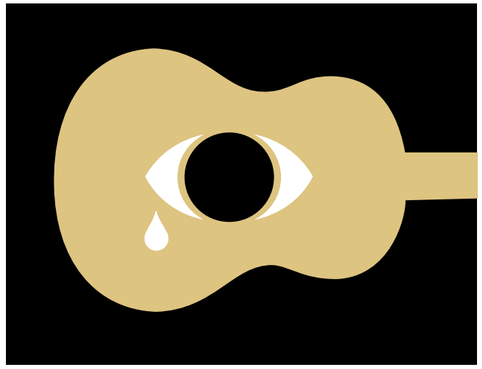
CLOSING NOTE

TO READ PAST ISSUES OR SUBSCRIBE TO BLUEPRINT GO TO **BLUEPRINT.UCLA.EDU**

FIRST PERSON:

LIVING THROUGH CRISES

For this special edition of Blueprint's Landscape section, we asked writers to consider the ways their lives have been changed by this year's crises. Contributors include a recent UCLA graduate, a performing artist and the President of the Los Angeles City Council, among others. Here are their thoughts.



THE PERFORMING ARTS

by Eva B. Ross

ON JAN. 1, 2020, I WAS IN CHICAGO. It was the morning after closing night of a New Year's holiday revue I had been performing in at the Studio 5 Performing Arts Center. The cast and crew gathered early for a wrap party. The Rose Bowl Parade buzzed in the background. In the midst of it all, I had an idea for a song, so I slipped away from the party, went to the basement and jotted it down. I called it "Happy New Year." The first line went,

Adding up the coming months,
it's looking like I'll see you when
I see you

At the time, I was gearing up for a year mostly on the road. I'd just released my first EP, "Playlist for the Apocalypse," in October; most of January would be spent doing an East Coast run; a few L.A. shows in February; and in March I'd be playing gigs in the U.K. and Ireland. I was craving the solitude that comes with being on the road — surrounded by new people, yet swept along in motion.

March changed all that. Shows everywhere were canceled; venues shut down indefinitely, some perhaps forever. Instead of touring, I was recording "Happy New Year" via Zoom session from my home in L.A. Strangely, the song was still true, but its meaning had changed. It was, indeed, a new year — but almost as if the universe had been listening a bit too intently to my inner yearning for solitude, loneliness was now government-mandated, and the unknown of the road had been replaced by an enveloping uncertainty.

The chorus of "Happy New Year" goes:

If I learned anything from last year,
it's that I can't count on anything —
so I'm trying not to count on this

When I wrote it in January, I was writing about hesitancy toward love after heartbreak. By March, this line (and the title of my EP, for that matter) mocked me. There are so few certainties in a music career, but touring is one of the few paychecks you can count on. There is no ladder, no neatly forged path. Your product is, after all, the poems you pull out of your head, and your relevance is subject to the whims of public opinion. To stay sane, I tend to focus on the "doing."

Quarantine slowed and narrowed life and riled up my insecurity as a songwriter and performer: Does my contribution matter? When I'm on the road or playing shows, the process itself — the activity — is a distraction from this question. But the stillness of quarantine is quite different from the solitude of riding the train to a new city or sitting alone in a hotel room after a show. My ears don't hum from the PA system; I'm not nervous about tomorrow's performance. There is no routine to focus my attention or to distract from it.

That's not to say this time has been empty. To the contrary, it's been an opportunity to consider what matters and how best to contribute. Each week of isolation brings new public awareness for important causes. At a moment when we must be acutely aware of the "essential" and at a time when lives and livelihoods are being lost and examined, I can't help but wonder whether music matters. Moreover, as a cis-White woman who writes about her own experiences, do my experiences matter right now? If focusing on the "doing" is what helps me create, is now an appropriate time to be so narrowly focused on my own story?

Today, I watch as the year I welcomed with a song about goodbyes spins by out my window. I desperately want to get back to the doing — but perhaps sitting with the questions is exactly where I should be. There will be songs and shows again — they're inevitable, at least for me, because making music hasn't ever been a choice. I'm becoming increasingly grateful for the stillness.

QUARANTINE SLOWED AND NARROWED LIFE AND RILED UP MY INSECURITY AS A SONGWRITER AND PERFORMER: DOES MY CONTRIBUTION MATTER?

And on days where my head is heavy, I go for a walk. I listen to music. A few songs in and then that one comes on, the one with the warm chords and the chorus that makes each step feel lighter than the last. The sidewalk is a church pew, and under my mask, I'm mouthing along with an entire congregation. The music is ... essential.

For now, I am listening, I am inspired, and I am coming to understand the purpose of my work. As for the shows? I'll see them when I see them.

ILLUSTRATION BY **NOMA BAR**

GOVERNING LOS ANGELES

by Nury Martinez

I DON'T SLEEP MUCH. I stay up late, reviewing reports and briefs my staff sends me, watching the news and scanning my phone for stories that might impact my constituents here in the northeast San Fernando Valley and across the city. In these dark days of COVID-19, where Latinos and Blacks are the No. 1 victims of the health and economic effects of this deadly virus, relevant stories aren't hard to find.

Mornings start early in our home in working-class Sun Valley, which I share with my husband and 11-year-old daughter. She's brilliant, thoughtful, caring — and stubborn (like her mom). I overheard her talking to a friend recently who was concerned her family was going to lose their housing. It was similar to a story she told me back in January before I became City Council president — when another friend's father broke his arm and could not work. She asked me then as she did now: "What is going to happen to them?"

As a Latina who grew up the child of working-poor immigrants, my answer has been a Families First Agenda that I launched when I became council president. It prioritizes the working poor — people who do everything right and still struggle.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 also prioritizes the working poor.

Even when I'm exhausted after a full day and night of work, as well as mom, wife and daughter responsibilities to assist my 81-year-old mother, that reality keeps me up.

As a child, I would sit at the feet of my late father, a Mexican immigrant who took the bus six days a week for 30 years to work as a dishwasher to support our family. We would watch Spanish-language news together and talk about politics and the world around us.

"Necesitas saber lo que está pasando, hija." You need to know what's going on, he would say.

My father was empowering me. He was the first male feminist I ever knew. He taught me compassion and to consider all people's perspectives. I miss him every single day.

My mom worked as a seamstress and a factory worker. She is a strong woman whose rules were the law in our house. She taught my sister and me to be bold, assertive and fearless as women.

Our parents also instilled in us a strong work ethic.

During the pandemic, while other governmental bodies delayed meetings for long periods of time, our City Council continued to meet virtually, and still does.

Since my staff and I and others have to physically be in council chambers for those meetings, it is not without risk.

Since March, we've had several City Hall staff and family members test positive for COVID-19. I've been tested twice for possible exposure to the virus. Unlike more than 230,000 Angelenos, I tested negative, and thank God all who tested positive have recovered.

COVID-19 is pushing our working-poor families, and others, to the breaking point. And it's pushing children to have unnatural conversations about rent, bills and money.

I've worked with my colleagues on the City Council to protect them by enacting a strong eviction moratorium, and directing hundreds of millions of dollars to provide renters relief, childcare, eviction defense, free grants for small businesses, including street vendors, and a program that will pay low-income workers who test positive for the virus to stay home and recover. We've also enacted worker retention laws and paid family leave during COVID, as well as hosted community food and diaper giveaways, free laundry service

UNFORTUNATELY, COVID-19 ALSO PRIORITIZES THE WORKING POOR.

and countless other assistance events throughout the city, but my overriding fear is it will not be enough. We need more state and federal assistance to keep people in their homes — especially where we lack funding or legal jurisdiction to act.

On a separate track, the murder of George Floyd and other Black Americans by law enforcement has rightly led to a reckoning on racism that has been due in this country for hundreds of years. It is my hope and goal, as the City of Los Angeles reimagines public safety, that those Black and Brown communities who are directly impacted and will be affected by any outcomes are the ones who lead the discussion on solutions.

I grew up in Pacoima and worked as a social and environmental activist. When I became the first Latina City Council president in 170 years, I said, "Little girls who looked and sounded like me didn't ever think they could one day hold such positions of power."

There are some who wish it weren't so. As council president, I routinely experience racist, sexist and sexually abusive attacks from protesters outside my home, in City Council meetings and on social media. None of that will keep me from doing this job that I love. I am a strong Latina, and just like the people I represent, I don't quit.

Martinez in the president of the Los Angeles City Council.

A TEST OF OPTIMISM

by Aidan Rutten

I ALWAYS HAVE BEEN AN OPTIMIST.

With encouraging friends and a caring family, I have never felt the impulse to think that I could not overcome an obstacle and had to accept defeat. This was perhaps never truer than in seventh grade at Holy Angels grammar school, when our homeroom teacher began a weekly after-school program for students who wanted to do more with their writing than our textbooks required. She and our parents volunteered, at no cost, to run this program. I realized then that people were not necessarily limited by institutional constraints like school hours, and that I could put my dreams into action regardless of any perceived barriers.

My optimism became a habit of mind. Sometimes I have been disappointed. But more often, I have been right to hope. So it is that I believe now, as I always have, that people will eventually overcome their differences and fears, both large and petty. I believe that we, meaning everyone, will at some point endeavor to find a way toward a greatness beyond what we currently think is possible.

Even so, I also believe that hope, however enduring, must be tempered by history. The 1930s, for example, were a time much like our own, tormented by economic dislocation, outbursts of prejudice and sociopolitical discord. Many in

THE UNASSAILABLE TRUTH IS THAT UNLESS WE SAFEGUARD OUR HOPE ... AND NURTURE IT INTO GROWTH, THEN OUR PRESENT WILL SKID INTO PERMANENT DISREPAIR.

that era, including a large number of intellectuals, lost faith in democracy. They felt compelled to choose between left-wing and right-wing authoritarianism. The future, however, belonged to those who retained the belief that liberal, pluralist democracy was not simply the most decent way forward but also the most pragmatic. Democracy, as Winston Churchill said, was the worst form of government — except for all the others.

Today, many of us have fallen into believing our historical moment requires that we choose between an illiberal progressivism on the left and an aspirational fascism on the right, of the sort proposed by, say, Donald Trump or Hungary's Viktor Orban. Against what many would say is all the evidence, I reject that as a false choice.

My own academic career seems to have been defined by decline. Dangerous regimes and a chilling rise in illiberal democracy around the world have been made more alarming by an American president who admires the same despots responsible for those assaults on democracy.

Watching in sorrow as crisis after crisis drenches the daily news would be bad enough, if not for the fact that we humans are largely the cause of these miseries. To avoid seeming pretentious, I once refrained from this kind of commentary, but it has become impossible to ignore the fact that our willful collective selfishness and failures are responsible for so many afflictions in the world.

My empathy has grown a thick callus as I prioritize what to be the most upset about. Every time I hear something outrageous about the president, I just nod and continue with my day. A significant number of Americans apparently are no longer disgusted by family separations at the border, collusion with foreign powers, withholding military aid in exchange for political favors, race baiting, pointless lies about rally size, and a lifetime of inexcusable personal behavior that would have barred literally anyone else from the Oval Office. Beyond the White House, this administration's ineptitude has made other crises, like climate change, refugees, institutional racism and, of course, COVID-19, far more frightening, because people know that any response is likely to be, perversely, the wrong response.

I am saddened — and a bit battered — by everything that is happening, but for all of its flaws and uncertainties, my generation is passionate, aware and motivated to seek social change. While we may not always pursue this change in the most effective or efficient ways, our passion for reform, when tempered by knowledge and experience, will lead to a better future.

The unassailable truth is that unless we safeguard our hope — the optimism I was fortunate to learn at home, in school and from experience — and nurture it into growth, then our present will skid into permanent disrepair. Our future will be grim. In a vicious circle, our pessimism will give birth to irrefutable reasons to abandon hope.

One day, I believe, we will achieve a society that provides equal treatment and opportunities to all, encourages everyone in their strengths and helps them overcome their weaknesses. We can achieve greatness by caring for each other, creating new ideas, inspiring art and liberating technology.

We will one day cure more diseases, including COVID-19. We will embrace the future and exceed the bounds of history.

CAMPUS LIFE AND BEYOND

by Audrey Prescott

SOMETIMES YOU DON'T KNOW which time might be the last time.

I was in Powell Library when I heard that remaining finals and all classes for the spring term would be offered remotely. Because other UC campuses had already announced similar plans, I wasn't surprised. But I didn't realize this would be my last time in the iconic library as a UCLA student.

At first, things were chaotic and weird. It seemed as if no one, least of all students, really knew what they should be doing. Off campus, canned goods and toilet paper disappeared from grocery aisles as the panic and confusion set in. Many students returned to their hometowns, emptying campus and changing the composition of Westwood. Before long, I had two new roommates, a guitar that I had bought on impulse, and four new classes to attend through Zoom.

Anonymous posts on a Facebook page called "UCLA Secrets" offered glimpses of life through the eyes of my peers. Some told of economic anxieties, others recounted forced returns to abusive homes. Academic challenges vied with concerns about public health and politics. And yet, even as so many things changed, some did not: I woke up every day for classes, read academic articles

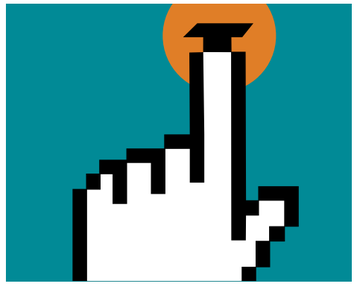


ILLUSTRATION BY **NOMA BAR**

and procrastinated on assignments. Old habits blended with new routines; together, they created a "new normal."

For every strange new aspect of life — constant sanitizing, avoiding other pedestrians — there were little bursts of life: laughing with my roommate as she sang "Happy Birthday" to her grandma on a family Zoom call while I sat next to her attending a lecture; missing the chance to meet any of my spring quarter professors in person but greeting a professor's 15-year-old daughter during an online seminar. Remote friendship became a fact of life and reunited me with high school friends. Zoom happy hours and creative PowerPoint parties, where each person shared a presentation on a goofy topic, replaced traditional social gatherings. Living interestingly isn't easily thwarted.

In late May, everything changed again, as protests began around the country in response

CHANGE BEGAN HAPPENING ON A PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE LEVEL, AS MY PEERS AND I SIMULTANEOUSLY EXAMINED OURSELVES AND THE SYSTEMS WE PARTICIPATE IN.

to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade and so many others across years and generations. The sense of pent-up anger was unmistakable and powerful. The social upheaval directly responded to hundreds of years of racial violence that had been normalized long before COVID-19. And it expressed the frustrations that came with rising unemployment and lack of access to healthcare during the pandemic.

Change began happening on a personal and collective level, as my peers and I simultaneously examined ourselves and the systems we participate in. People I had known for years, but who had never seemed politically active, flooded Instagram with tales of radical transformation. Selfies and nature photos were replaced with infographics and resources for education and action. Ideas that I was accustomed to engaging with in sociology classes and Twitter circles became topics of common conversation among friends and family. A long-overdue social awakening is continuously taking place, and it's difficult and defeating, exciting and beautiful all at once. The coronavirus forced us indoors and away from one another. Our anger, hope and drive for change brought us outside in protest and together again.

There is an odd feeling that comes with being in a stage of personal transition at the same time as society. I was in a new city and a month into college when the 2016 election altered my childhood view of politics. Now as I graduate during a pandemic and civil rights movement, my perspectives are shifting once again. I've generally experienced change in small increments that don't drastically alter my daily routine. Now I have immersed myself in change: impulsively dying my own hair in my bathroom, interviewing for jobs over Zoom, and examining every thought and viewpoint that passes through my mind.

Since March, I have gone from a college student eager to graduate — and patiently consider my place in the world — to a recent graduate who is ready to change it. The world is moving toward the next new normal, and I'm determined to be part of it.

PHOTO BY **EMILIANO BAR / UNSPLASH**

FAMILY

by Zach Slobig

"I GUESS YOU COULD SAY I'm playing Russian roulette." My brother Tim was on the phone. It was several weeks into statewide shelter-in-place orders back in April. "I'm really taking a risk every day, and it feels like they've just sacrificed us."

He was trying on a new identity, one that he didn't choose for himself: "essential worker." Tim is a supervisor at a busy L.A. branch of a major home improvement retailer, and he was getting nervous. A coworker had tested positive for coronavirus — someone he worked closely with — and other people were starting to stay home. He was continuing to work, despite available sick leave. I talked to him while he stood at the door, counting customers and making sure they wore masks. The line snaked out into the parking lot and down the street. "If this thing gets really bad and they have to shut down the store," he wondered aloud, "where will I be then?"

Tim, three years my junior, is Black. I'm White. We have an older Black brother, an older White brother and a Black sister. A two-toned family forged by adoption made for a curious sight in our working-class neighborhood in Washington, D.C., during the '70s and '80s. We five siblings have taken divergent paths in the decades since. These days I work as the writer and editor for a Silicon Valley-based philanthropy. Tim's past is checkered. He spent just shy of 13 years incarcerated for bank robbery. He was shuffled among federal prisons in Oregon, California, Louisiana, and Virginia, with roughly a year and a half of that in segregated housing: "solitary."

Over the course of some eight weeks, as Tim and I talked on the phone regularly, we settled into and bumped up against the unfamiliar and uncertain reality of the new pandemic-impacted world we shared. As familiar and fatal acts of police brutality sparked an uprising for racial justice that swept the nation, I was reminded of the worlds we'll never really share.

"I feel like I'm in prison!" During shelter-in-place, while I scrolled through social media, I had been reading comments like that from folks getting antsy with self-isolation and social distancing. As the weeks wore on, my daughter's San Francisco public school closed its doors, and the streets emptied around me. I wondered how this moment looked through the eyes of someone who had truly known confinement.

Self-quarantine and "solitary" have very little in common. "I never told you the story of my first time in there, but I lost my mind," Tim told me. He had been in solitary for months and began hearing voices within weeks. Convinced that eyes were watching him at all hours from the other side of his mirror, he covered it with toilet paper and plugged the vent. He would wake up gasping for breath. He watched the walls close in around him. "I'd smash my face up against that little window in the door so there was no way I could see the cell, so I wouldn't feel like I was in that box," he said. "You never recover from that."

This was in the federal prison at Lompoc — the same place he met my daughter for the first time. Nami, not yet a year old, sat there on his knee smiling up at her uncle, his scarred and tattooed hands cradling her gently. "It felt like I was holding a little baby doll," he remembered.

As our phone calls continued, Tim shared a sense of regret for squandered time. He wondered aloud: If he had worked harder and had not been a knucklehead, would he be living check-to-check now, putting his health on the line every time he punched a clock? Meanwhile, my work life had shifted entirely to Zoom calls, and I barely left the house. He and I were navigating the worsening pandemic in very different boats, and the layers of privilege separating me from Tim became glaring. Our family may have been a Carter-era vision of racial harmony, but it was not

immune to the structural inequities at the bedrock of this country.

Tim thought about the guys he still knew in prison, where social distancing is impossible and medical resources are basic at best. "You never hear about what happens in prison," he said. "People die in there all the time, and you won't read about it in the papers." He told me of savage beatdowns and indifferent stabbings for $50 debts. "There's gonna be full-fledged riots if this thing gets out of control in there," he said, foretelling the outbreaks of the virus at San Quentin and other prisons during the months ahead.

THIS MUST HAVE BEEN HOW DAD FELT WHEN HE MARCHED WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING.

By the beginning of May, the rumor mill at Tim's job had kicked into high gear. At least 10 of his coworkers had tested positive for COVID-19. Check-cashing places near work had closed down, and he now had to go to liquor stores to get monthly money orders for his restitution payments. "There's no app on your phone for that," he said, laughing. His parole officer had been hounding him, saying he'd fallen behind. "Man, this is the best I've done in my whole life — the longest time I've had an honest paycheck — but they don't let up," he said. "Their job is to stand on your neck and see if you can handle the pressure."

Three weeks later, a Minneapolis police officer killed George Floyd. In Los Angeles, protesters blocked the 101 Freeway, followed by citywide curfews that made getting home in time a challenge. Looting had gutted storefronts next to Tim's place of work. He arrived at home one night to find his block splashed with lights from 10 police cars.

"Please don't mess with me," he thought, as he opened the gate to his building directly across the street. He texted me a photo of himself masked. "You used to get arrested if you looked like this," he wrote. "Now you get a ticket if you don't."

As the protests gathered strength, so did Tim. He texted photos of himself and a friend stenciling George Floyd's image on sheets of cardboard. The next night, the citywide curfew ended, and he joined thousands in the streets of downtown L.A. demanding justice. He hadn't participated in a mass protest since the D.C. public schools closed for the Million Man March.

He lifted his sign and poured his heart into every call-and-response chant. Homeless people emerged from tents to join the throng, while loft dwellers leaned out their windows above, banging pots and pans and bellowing through bullhorns in solidarity.

"I said to Mom, 'This must have been how Dad felt when he marched with Martin Luther King,'" Tim told me the next day. "I can't vote or do any of that, so it made me feel alive — doing something to let people know how I feel. It was like I grew 10 feet and 200 pounds walking down those streets."

PHOTO BY **CHRISHENRY / UNSPLASH**

"A LIGHTER LOOK"

by Rick Meyer

Rick Meyer's regularly appearing column takes a lighter look at politics and public affairs around the world. This month: A Community of One

FOR MY BARBECUE IN THE BACK YARD, I brought my own food. One hot dog. One hamburger. One dip for the chips. It was OK to double-dip. I saved the paper plate and the plastic knife, fork and spoon. I could use them again. After I cleaned the grill, I played solitaire.

The next day, I went back to food that fit under the door.

I planned my next trip based on recommendations I found on the Internet: I'd visit Las Kitchenas, Costa del Bathrrome. St. Balonica. La Rotanda de Sofa, Santa Bedroome and El Bed.

Isolation — was it lonely, or was it just me?

We've learned many things from the coronavirus pandemic. At the top of my list is how to be by myself. I was serious about sheltering in place, and I'll never forget what it was like to be a community of one.

You can make a speech to yourself. No podium, microphone or stage required. You don't have to dress up. You don't have to dress at all.

You can deliver the speech in the shower.

Or you can sing in the shower. Nobody will complain.

Indeed, you don't even have to shower. Or shave. Or get a haircut.

It's a thrill when Amazon delivers your deodorant.

YOU CAN MAKE A SPEECH TO YOURSELF. NO PODIUM, MICROPHONE OR STAGE REQUIRED. YOU DON'T HAVE TO DRESS UP. YOU DON'T HAVE TO DRESS AT ALL.

You can tell bad jokes, known as Dad jokes. As usual, nobody laughs, but nobody groans either. That's because nobody is there.

At dinner, you can wear a tie. Dangle it in your soup. Nobody will notice. You can spread hummus on both sides of your bread and strawberry jam on everything else. For dessert, you can eat a bag of Doritos. No one will say a word.

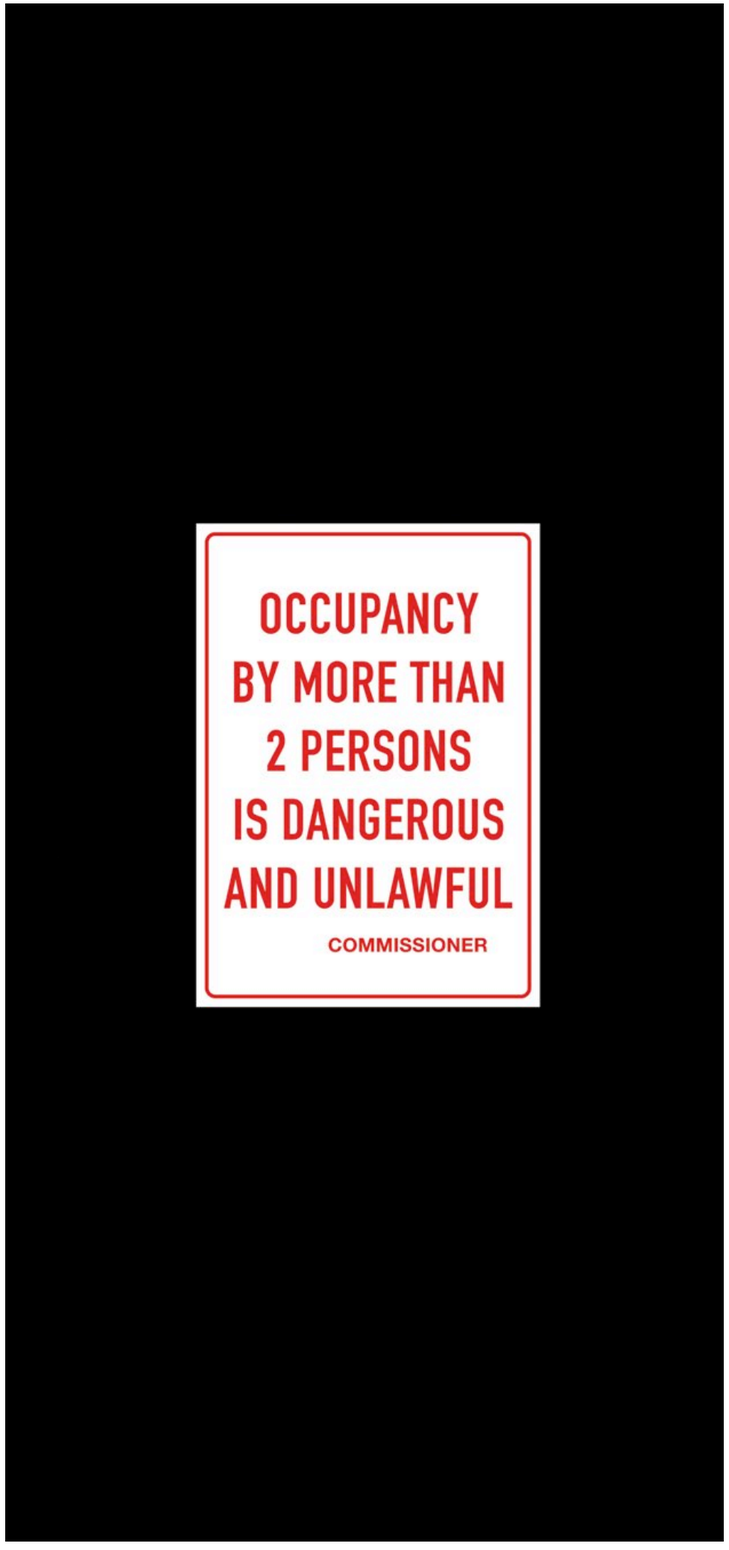


PHOTO BY **VISUALS / UNSPLASH**

SOME THINGS WILL HAPPEN NATURALLY. YOU WILL REMEMBER FONDLY WHEN MAKING EYE CONTACT WAS POSSIBLE — OR HUGGING A FRIEND, OR HIGH-FIVING A STRANGER AT A BALLGAME.

You can let the dishes pile up. You can nap for as long as you like. You can refuse to make your bed.

You don't have to vacuum, or you can vacuum all afternoon if you're bored.

You can try ambitious things that you've always wanted to do: Read *War and Peace*. Nobody will interrupt. Or memorize Marc Antony's eulogy for Julius Caesar. If you muff a line, who will know?

You can talk to a squirrel on your front lawn and laugh at his response.

You can turn off news about tweet rants; stupidity is contagious. Tweet your own lies, insults and conspiracies. At least they'll be intelligent.

Some things will happen naturally. You will remember fondly when making eye contact was possible — or hugging a friend, or high-fiving a stranger at a ballgame.

You will also think, not so fondly, of things that you are glad to be missing. The New Yorker offers these:

The Boston Symphony Orchestra Plays the Throat Noises of Rudy Giuliani.

Slide-Whistle Night at Yankee Stadium.

Uncle Ed's Annual Garage Fudge Festival.

During times of peaceful silence, you will wonder what you were pursuing so desperately before the pandemic began.

Such quiet times are to be cherished.

You can use them to store a half dozen things in a time capsule to remind you of your self-quarantine, or you can binge-watch Netflix with a Costco-sized bucket of popcorn, or you can shop online for something you don't really need, like a Costco-sized bucket of popcorn.

You also can play tic-tac-toe against yourself.

Or write down the things you did when you were alone. Nobody will think you're crazy.

TO DEFUND OR NOT TO DEFUND?

Bernard Parks Reflects on Race, Policing and a Life of Service

PHOTO BY **FRANCINE ORR**

WRITTEN BY
JIM NEWTON

WHEN BERNARD C. PARKS, FORMER CHIEF OF the Los Angeles Police Department, watched the videotape of Minneapolis officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on George Floyd's neck, Parks noticed something that most people did not.

As the world well knows, Chauvin and his partners forcibly confronted Floyd outside a convenience store on May 25. With his knee, Chauvin pinned Floyd to the ground. Floyd was face down. He gasped, and he begged Chauvin to let him up. Floyd pleaded: "I can't breathe."

Parks viewed the video with 37 years of experience as a police officer. He is African American and grew up in the LAPD. He became chief in 1997 and was elected to the Los Angeles City Council in 2002. Today, when some people respond to the indisputable observation that "Black lives matter" by insisting that "blue lives matter," Parks represents both viewpoints — and, as his life is testament, he is willing to air his views and unwilling to bend them to the desires of others. It is not surprising, then, that when Bernard Parks watched Chauvin press his blue knee into Floyd's black neck, Parks noticed something telling.

"I couldn't believe that the officer had his hands in his pockets," Parks said in a recent interview. "When [officers] are talking about how dangerous something is, you can generally tell the real danger in how their partners are reacting and how animated they are. … Here, you've got a guy on the ground, and a guy on his neck, and his hands are in his pockets. And his partners are standing there like they're at a picnic. This is not a dangerous situation."

Parks had seen something like this before. In 1991, LAPD officers Larry Powell and Tim Wind pulled over Rodney King on a street corner in Lake View Terrace, where King had brought his Hyundai to a stop after evading the Highway Patrol. Ordered from the car, King hesitated and resisted, then attempted to flee. Not realizing that their actions were being captured on videotape — in an era when cellphone cameras had yet to make this an everyday occurrence — Powell and Wind beat King into submission, guided by Sgt. Stacey Koon and assisted by Officer Ted Briseno.

Much has been said and written about the Rodney King beating and the criminal and civil trials that followed. One enduring aspect for Parks was the reaction of others at the scene. A dozen or so officers from various departments — LAPD, Highway Patrol and LAUSD police — watched motionless and did nothing, then or afterward. They were not alarmed; they did not reach for their guns or call for help. From that, Parks said, "You really realized that [King] was not the danger" that Powell and Wind would later claim.

In Minneapolis, Chauvin and his partners conveyed the same calm that Parks remembered from 1991. They took a suspect, pulled him out of

his car, forced him to the pavement, cut off his air and then pressed down on him, impassively, until he died. Was that murder?

"It's as close as you can get," Parks said.

"NOTHING IS SUSTAINED THAT DOES NOT HAVE A MEASURED APPROACH OVER TIME."

— Bernard Parks, former LAPD chief and Los Angeles City Council member

BERNARD PARKS WAS BORN IN BEAUMONT, Texas, in 1943 and was brought as a baby to Los Angeles, where he was raised. He joined the Los Angeles Police Department at age 20 because the prospect of being a police officer paid better than the job he was doing for General Motors. He graduated from the academy and received his badge in 1965.

Parks joined an LAPD that was almost exclusively White, and he finished the academy just in time for the Watts riot, which tore through the city and county and exposed deep fissures in the region's racial fabric. The McCone Commission, which investigated the riot, heard from witness after witness who complained about police brutality and racism at the LAPD.

Over the next 15 years, Parks studied hard. It was important to do well on written promotional exams, because during the oral exams, senior officers could tell whether the applicant was Black. Parks rose rapidly. White colleagues were alternately impressed and annoyed. One told him he should consider himself a success if he ever made sergeant. In 1980, he made commander — and then deputy chief in two more years. He was a rare black face in the upper echelons of Daryl Gates' LAPD. Parks had once been regarded as "too young, too Black," he told me in 2000; but by the time Gates left, Parks was ready.

Gates retired under fire after the King beating and the 1992 rioting that followed the acquittal of officers involved. Parks was among a small number of internal candidates for the chief's job. But the city and its leadership tired of the LAPD, its history and its struggles. They turned instead to an outsider, Willie L. Williams, the Black police commissioner of Philadelphia.

Williams brought some strengths to Los Angeles. An amiable, easygoing figure with a deft sense for community relations, Williams helped calm the furor around the LAPD. He was popular, at least initially, with the public and political leadership, and his presence allowed some of the pressure on the department to subside.

But Williams never fully grasped the reins of leadership, and his tenure was rocked by his mishandling of allegations that he had accepted freebies from a Las Vegas casino. Questioned about those charges by the Police Commission, he lied. More significantly, the department drifted, unsure about what was expected — should officers be aggressively arresting suspects to drive down crime or improving community relations by focusing on problem solving, even if that meant arrests declined? No one answered those questions convincingly, and when Williams' five-year term ended, he was asked to leave.

Parks was appointed to succeed him. He served as chief from 1997 to 2002. In many ways, Parks was Williams' opposite. He was forceful and firmly in control, and the LAPD under his leadership focused on crime-fighting. Arrests rose, and crime fell. At the same time, Parks was an aggressive disciplinarian, demoting, reprimanding or firing hundreds of officers. But while Williams was easygoing and friendly, Parks could be combative and bristly, particularly when faced with outside criticism or intervention.

That came to a head with the Rampart police scandal. Corruption and allegations of criminal activity by members of an LAPD CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums) unit dated to the Williams years, but they surfaced during Parks' tenure. And Parks, who could have treated the matter as part of the legacy of his predecessor, instead fought against the revelations and efforts to reform the department to address them.

Most notably, Parks opposed entry of the United States Justice Department into the controversy. This put Parks in the position of seeming to defend the LAPD's status quo, and it had the odd effect of pitting an African American chief committed to rooting out misconduct against the efforts of outside reformers.

The Justice Department pressed ahead, and the city agreed to enter into a consent decree that ceded authority over many reforms to a federal judge. Parks concluded his term in 2002, and Mayor James Hahn, who had run with strong support among Black voters, made the difficult decision not to reappoint Parks to a second term.

The result: Parks had been forced out, and Hahn lost re-election.

Parks then ran for City Council, where he served until 2015. Hahn was appointed to the Superior Court, where he is today. The consent decree, which the city and federal government entered into in 2001, remained in effect until 2013. It is widely credited with providing a structure for reform that Parks' successor, William Bratton, used to guide the LAPD forward in areas such as training, tracking problem officers and handling complaints.

Combined with previous decrees and department efforts in diversity and community policing, the 2001 decree forms much of the basis for how the LAPD operates today.

ALL OF WHICH GIVES PARKS an unusually rich history through which to view the current debates over policing, Black Lives Matter, institutional racism and the tension between peaceful protest and civic disorder. He has served as a police officer in communities whose residents all too often have been the victims of aggressive, even racist officers. And he has represented those same communities as a council member, where he has heard their pleas for more protection. Few people have seen questions about race and policing from more sides or with more varied perspectives.

As his comments about Officer Chauvin and George Floyd make clear, Parks is no defender of the cavalier use of force by police. He believes the officers who beat Rodney King were wrong, and that the officers who killed Floyd are guilty of — as he put it — something close to murder.

But he also is suspicious of those who demand "defunding" the police, those who see policing as uniquely susceptible to racism, or those who profess to speak for entire communities or even cities. To take just one example, Parks said he supports increased local investment in services such as mental health and youth programs, both of which might help alleviate crime — and both of which are especially needed in poor communities, like those he represented in council.

But why, he asked, should that money be taken from the police, whose services are needed in these same communities?

"Why it's police funding I don't know.

"Why not look at the larger city, county, state budget, and say: 'These are things we'd like to see funded?' Why would you pit one agency against your agenda? You're going to have a flashback from those who live in certain parts of the city and who say: 'I'm really not into this. I just want safety.'"

That approach — criticism of police misconduct combined with community sensitivity about safety — makes Parks a lonely voice in the present conversation, a moderate in a debate that does not allow much room for moderation. If this bothers him, he does not let on. He believes this moment demands reflection and a sense of proportion and history, not a sudden reaction.

"Nothing is sustained that does not have a measured approach over time," he said. "It's very rare that knee-jerk or sudden flashes sustain. The real issue will be: How far will this go?"

Parks is less even-handed or patient when it comes to critiquing protests and the federal response. He wholeheartedly supports the right to express dissent and opposes the federal government's clumsy efforts to crack down in places such as Portland, Oregon.

PHOTO BY BARBARA DAVIDSON

"It's a major hindrance," he said of the Trump administration's use of federal law enforcement agents in protest areas. "No law enforcement officers should be imposed upon [a city] without their request. They'll never be successful unless there's coordination."

Instead, ordering federal law enforcement onto the streets of Portland or Chicago or any other city escalates tension, evades accountability and introduces fear into many communities, he said, especially when those forces include immigration authorities.

Altogether, he said, this makes difficult situations worse.

Why would the federal government send such forces without a request?

"Politics," he said.

I HAVE KNOWN PARKS for more than 25 years, from before his appointment as chief, through his time in that job, through his council tenure and beyond. We have not always agreed on issues or people. Parks is fiercely critical of some of my former colleagues, and I've written critically about some of his friends and allies.

But Parks is nothing if not true to his values and consistent — stubborn, some say — in defense of them.

Years ago, he told me about an incident from the late 1970s, when he was a new captain in the LAPD's 77th Street Division. Parks hung a picture in his office, a print that a cousin had made portraying a Black woman, her palm resting on her forehead in despair.

Parks was on vacation when a deputy chief, a White man, saw the portrait. The chief pronounced it racially divisive and had it removed.

When he got back from vacation, Parks demanded to know what had happened. He found the print and returned it to his office. It hung in the chief's office when Parks occupied that space in the old Parker Center, and it hung in his council office after that.

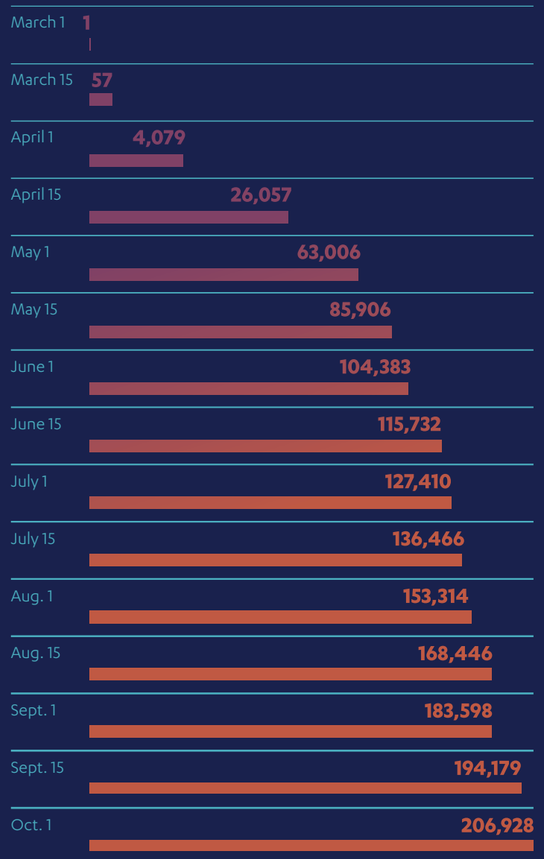
He left the City Council in 2015 and has been retired since. Today, the picture hangs in his house. He won't be taking it down for anyone.

FALLING APART, IN THREE ACTS

This year in American history will surely be remembered as one of disintegration — of a pandemic that led to a collapse, amidst which another round of police killings of Black men forced a deep reconsideration of the nation's history of race and racism.

COVID-19

The first death in the United States of COVID-19 was recorded on March 1. Since then, the toll has mounted with dizzying speed.

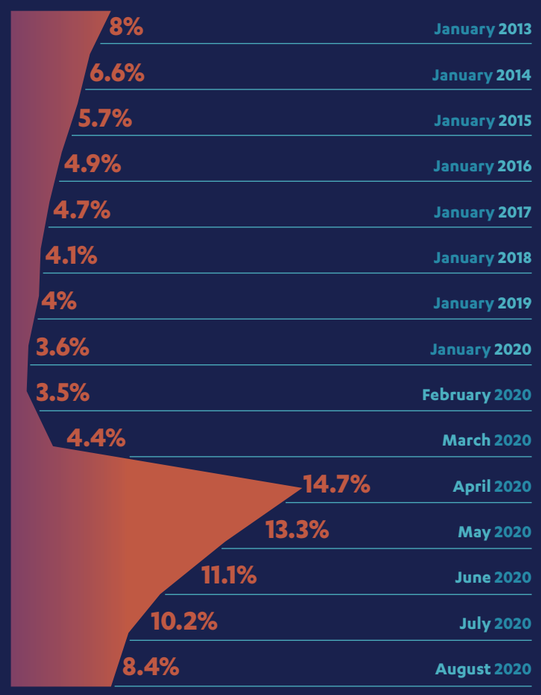


Source: **Our World in Data**, https://ourworldindata.org

THE ECONOMY

Unemployment dropped through the Obama years as his administration, which assumed office in the midst of the Great Recession, produced steady economic growth. That growth — and falling unemployment — continued through the early years of Trump's term but came to an abrupt halt when the virus hit the United States in March of 2020.

American Unemployment Rate:



Source: **Trading Economics**, https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/unemployment-rate

POLICE VIOLENCE

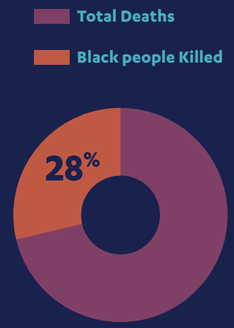
Despite decades of attention to the question of police violence, the number of men and women who die at the hands of American officers continues unabated. Here, annual statistics from recent years.

Police Killings

(includes deaths from shootings, beatings, tasers, car collisions and in-custody deaths while restrained):

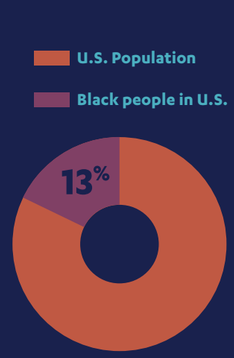
1,089	1,050	1,102	1,070	1,090	1,140	1,099
2013	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**

28%



of people killed by police are Black, over the years of 2013-2019.

13%



is the approximate percentage of Black people in the United States population.

Source: **Mapping Police Violence**, https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/nationaltrends

SAY THEIR NAMES

Emmet Till
LYNCHED
ON **AUG. 4, 1955**

Eulia Love
SHOT TO DEATH BY LAPD OFFICERS
ON **JAN. 3, 1979**

Rodney King
BEATEN BY LAPD OFFICERS
ON **MARCH 3, 1991**

Tyisha Miller
SHOT TO DEATH BY RIVERSIDE OFFICERS
ON **DEC. 28, 1998**

Amadou Diallo
SHOT TO DEATH BY NYPD OFFICERS
ON **FEB. 4, 1999**

Michael Brown
SHOT TO DEATH BY A FERGUSON, MISSOURI, OFFICER
ON **AUG. 9, 2014**

Breonna Taylor
SHOT BY LOUISVILLE OFFICERS
ON **MARCH 13, 2020**

George Floyd
KILLED BY MINNEAPOLIS OFFICERS
ON **MAY 25, 2020**

Rayshard Brooks
SHOT TO DEATH BY AN ATLANTA POLICE OFFICER
ON **JUNE 12, 2020**

ILLUSTRATION BY **NOMA BAR**

THE STRAIN ON FAMILIES

As COVID-19 Spread, Calls for Children at Risk Fell. Was that good?

WRITTEN BY
LISA FUNG

UPSTAIRS, ON THE FIFTH FLOOR of the nondescript 12-story office building in the heart of downtown Los Angeles, the quiet of a July afternoon was overwhelming. Its significance was harder to pinpoint.

Here at the Los Angeles County Child Protection Hotline, hundreds of calls would normally be pouring into the phone lines, answered by scores of social workers in the cubicles lining the floor as far as the eye can see. But by midafternoon on this day, only a smattering of hushed voices could be heard. The dimly lit room was largely deserted.

This room is the alarm bell for much tragedy. It is where concerned neighbors and attentive teachers, mindful police, shopkeepers or school counselors call to report worrisome indicators of violence against children. It is where the warnings of family stress — of parents who are at their wit's end or relatives whose rages turn on young boys and girls — reach expert ears. It is where society jumps in to aid children who cannot help themselves.

At first blush, then, it would seem that quiet here would be healthy: Fewer reports of child abuse or neglect might mean fewer children being hurt. And that's precisely what seemed to happen in the months after COVID-19 swept this region along with the rest of the world: Calls had dropped by more than 50%. Was that a reason for hope, a suggestion that the threat of infection had dulled some of humanity's violent desperation? Or was it something else?

"EVEN ON A PERFECT DAY, YOU DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT'S ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR OR WHAT KIND OF FAMILY YOU'RE GOING TO ENCOUNTER."

— Tania Cendejas, DCFS emergency response worker

"Based on my experience, I would be surprised if the incidents had gone down," said Bobby Cagle, director of Los Angeles County's Department of Family and Children Services since late 2017. "There's so many additional stressors on the family these days, based on all the things that are going on with COVID, including people losing jobs, people losing income, children and families being home ... I would be really surprised if the incidents had gone down."

The calls did, however. According to Cagle, the hotline is busiest after children have been in school for about a month, then it levels off until just before winter vacation, then rises again a month after kids return from break, and it finally peaks right before summer. The pandemic stay-at-home order coincided with one of those peak periods, so calls should have been going up, not down.

"It would not be uncommon in a 24-hour period for the hotline to have something in the order of 900 calls, whereas now on a weekday, we might have only 300 calls," said Greg Stock, the assistant regional administrator for DCFS who oversees the hotline. The massive drop in call volume, he said, was "just stunning."

Los Angeles has the nation's largest child welfare system, and it, like everything else, was battered by the virus. Given the wrenching changes in everyday life, which included a sharp drop in many crimes, perhaps families had responded by bonding more closely and protectively.

Sadly, however, another possibility emerged. The stay-at-home orders that came as a result of the pandemic meant fewer opportunities for professionals or others outside the home — teachers, social workers, police — to observe children in person, making it significantly harder to identify and stop cases of abuse and neglect, as well as provide services to the tens of thousands of children and families DCFS serves through intervention and assistance programs.

Last year, the hotline received more than 207,000 calls. Of that number, nearly one-third came from teachers and school officials (about 80,000 of those calls result in an investigation, and about 6% warrant an emergency response). Educators are "mandatory reporters," professionals who are required by law to report child maltreatment. Other mandatory reporters include law enforcement officers, childcare workers, counselors, coaches, physicians, nurses and other healthcare providers. Fewer calls, in other words, may not have meant less abuse, just less witnessing of abuse.

"The thought is that this drop in the number of calls is really due to the fact that children are not going out of their homes," said Laura Alongi Brinderson, a field faculty member in the Luskin Department of Social Welfare who leads the California Social Work Education Center training program at UCLA. "There are not as many people putting their eyes on these children as there used to be."

FROM THE START OF THE PANDEMIC, most of the DCFS workforce remained on the job as essential workers. While some staff members could work from home, nearly all of the more than 150 hotline social workers and supervisors initially continued to report to the downtown office, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Emergency response social workers — those sent out to investigate and assess whether intervention is needed — remained at work in the field, going to family homes to check on the welfare of children.

Like many essential workers across the country, DCFS faced a shortage of personal protective equipment, or PPE, particularly the N95 masks that provide the most protection from airborne particles. At the outset, Cagle says, the department had only 4,000 N95 masks for the staff of 9,000 and had difficulty securing PPE. They've since been able to obtain the less-protective surgical masks and other protective wear.

"We have 36,000 cases going on right now, and at any given time we have 36,000. So that means we have to have 36,000 masks for our workers on a monthly basis," he said. "We have about a two-month supply on hand across all of our offices, but any kind of hitch in the system of production can result in our having a shortage of those items."

The federal government and the state of California, acknowledging the lack of PPE, initially gave child welfare agencies leeway in conducting some virtual visits for non-emergency cases. The department had already begun working with the L.A. County Office of Education to explore ways to better assess children in a virtual environment, but COVID-19 accelerated those efforts.

"Like many things in the pandemic, the virtual visits are new to us," Cagle said. "We have always felt in-person visits were the best way to go. We still believe that. But we've also learned that — especially in a county the size of this, with the kind of traffic issues that we have — we have been able to extend our abilities."

One benefit of virtual visits has been the increase in caseworker contact with children. On average, Cagle says, they now have three to four contacts per child compared with one or two visits in person. "There may be things we can do to try to make a better system based upon what we've learned," he said.

FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE WORKER Tania Cendejas, COVID-19 is making an already tough job more challenging.

"Even on a perfect day, you don't really know what's on the other side of the door or what kind of family you're going to encounter," said Cendejas, who started with DCFS in 2015 and has been an emergency response worker since 2018. "In general, families and parents are doing the best they can do, given the circumstances. But there's been a whole other layer when you think about families that have been affected by job loss or actually contracting COVID. It's just a whole other layer of hardship."

Much of her routine remains the same, with the added precautions of PPE and social distancing. After receiving hotline referrals, gathering background information — school and medical records, law enforcement reports and other documentation — she heads out to family homes, where she will show up unannounced. Some assignments, such as visits to the Women's Central Jail to see clients, have required additional measures.

"I wore safety goggles and was super mindful of throwing away my pen after I signed in and changing out of my clothes right away when I got home," she said. Other assignments involve passing on information to families about resources they may need, such as food or housing.

Cendejas, 33, knows firsthand how this process can impact someone's life. When she was 2, she entered the system and was ultimately adopted in 1993. Today, she is assigned to the regional office in Lakewood where her own adoption worker once was based. The pandemic in the spring and the Black Lives Matter protests during the summer have added to the mental and physical challenges of her job, but she remains determined.

"I always have to keep in the back of my head that ultimately this is a point of intervention that could, potentially, ensure that the child is safe," she said. "Or if the family requires further intervention with the department, this is the outlet, and this could transform the trajectory of a child's or a family's life, depending on my assessment."

CALIFORNIA LAW REQUIRES that social workers respond within 10 days to non-emergency calls received by the hotline. In Los Angeles County, the response time has long been five days, but because of the challenges surrounding COVID-19, DCFS has moved back to the state-mandated 10 days.

Upon any initial contact, emergency social workers try to separate the child from his or her parents — especially when there is evidence that a child is being maltreated — to ensure the child can speak freely. Often, those first meetings take place in a school setting, where social workers are permitted to interview children for 30 to 45 minutes without parental consent. The school closings due to the pandemic eliminated that option. With the children now at home, the social workers still try to separate from the parents, talking with the children outside in the yard or elsewhere. Those conversations are far more difficult, however, than in the more neutral area of a school.

At the outset of the stay-at-home order, the court suspended in-person visits for children already in the system and their families, instead calling for remote visitation when possible. It later revised that order, but visits remained a challenge since the DCFS offices, public libraries and many restaurants — common meeting places for the families — were closed. In addition, case plans for families in the system initially came to a standstill as the courts limited hearings to emergency cases, such as detention hearings for newly detained children. Later, the courts conducted "stipulated hearings" for cases in process of reunifying families or cases that could be closed for which all parties were in agreement.

THE OUTLAY FOR THE ADDITIONAL PPE put an unexpected dent into DCFS' $2.6-billion budget. More significantly, the pandemic shutdown led to an enormous decline in sales tax revenue that the state allocates to DCFS and other agencies. "As the economy has taken a downturn, we've taken about a $200-million hit to our budget in very short order," Cagle said. "We're really having to tighten our belt in very specific areas — including staffing — to be able to meet those cuts."

Amid all of the challenges posed by COVID-19, DCFS also found it had to combat misinformation, such as false rumors that children would be removed from a household if a parent was found to have COVID-19. Those suspicions spring from long-standing apprehension about the agency, which has weathered high-profile deaths of children in its care.

"Most child agencies struggle with the perception that we are baby snatchers," Cagle said, "that our existence is around taking children out of homes, when in fact, if a child welfare system is operating correctly, it is about preserving families and making sure we don't take children out of the home."

Brinderson, whose CalSWEC trains master's degree students to work as child welfare or child protective service workers, says the last resort should be separating children from their parents. "The goal should always be the least disruptive intervention possible," she said. "It has to be pretty evident that the parent is a risk to a child for removal to happen, because that's going to be the last resort."

At the end of April, DCFS created a public service announcement to raise awareness about the drop in reports and to enlist the community's help to ensure children and families are "safe at home."

Families are facing a great amount of stress right now — and greater stress than at almost any moment in recent history. "That, in and of itself, concerns me," Cagle said. "But that concern needs to translate for us into providing supportive services to families and being there to support them."

SIZING UP THE LAPD

Jorja Leap's Deep Dive Into the LAPD's Community Safety Partnership Comes at an Unexpected Time, With Big Results

WRITTEN BY
JON REGARDIE

ILLUSTRATION BY **NOMA BAR**

"THERE'S NO WAY YOU'RE GOING TO TRANSFORM LAW ENFORCEMENT WITHOUT HITTING THEM OVER THE HEAD WITH THE RESEARCH."

— Jorja Leap, UCLA professor of social welfare

ON A MONDAY EVENING IN JULY, Mayor Eric Garcetti, Police Chief Michel Moore and a cadre of other local leaders assembled in the Tom Bradley Room at the top of City Hall to announce the formation of the LAPD's Community Safety Partnership Bureau. It was a groundbreaking step.

Perhaps more extraordinary was the trio of factors that propelled it: a visionary if not-maximized police program that had run for nearly a decade; a comprehensive UCLA evaluation that took a year to complete; and a tumultuous two months following the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer and subsequent demands to reimagine policing in Los Angeles.

Moore cast the new bureau in historic terms.

"This model represents a pivot, if you will," he said, "a strategy of moving ourselves away from a containment and suppression model to one that has increased community capacity, a sense of overall safety, where you see the lower levels of crime in concert with a lower number of arrests but increased trust."

THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP Bureau marks the expansion of a program born of an effort to reduce violence in a quartet of housing projects and bolster the relationship between law enforcement and residents. That program, called the Community Safety Partnership, was begun in 2011 by then-Police Chief Charlie Beck, civil rights attorney Connie Rice of the Advancement Project, and the City Housing Authority, with significant input from Phil Tingirides, commanding officer of the Southeast Division, and his wife, Sgt. Emada Tingirides, who were independently working on outreach efforts in Watts.

The program included assigning police officers to a housing project for a five-year period, so that they became a consistent and familiar presence (officers volunteered for the assignment and received a pay grade advancement).

The following years saw expansions to other locations and the occasional spot of good press. But even as the program gained traction, those involved with CSP had a realization: They didn't know if it was actually making a difference.

"If it was just a bunch of civil right lawyers and residents and converted police saying it works, and there's no documentation, [critics will] simply say it's the fever dreams of some people who say cops ought to be social workers," Rice told Blueprint. "So it was important to have that evaluated, because if you don't have independent people saying it works, the cops who do not want to change will say, 'It's nuts and we're not doing it.'"

RICE REACHED OUT TO JORJA LEAP, an anthropologist and professor of social welfare at the Luskin School of Public Affairs, and the director of the UCLA Social Justice Research Partnership. Leap, who had spent decades working in Watts, was immediately interested, and the duo began laying the groundwork for an analysis of CSP. Rice raised the money, securing funds from nonprofits including the California Endowment, the Weingart Foundation and the Ballmer Group, and agreed to step away from the process, knowing the integrity of the evaluation would depend upon the researchers being free from pressure to deliver a result pleasing to those who controlled the purse strings. Leap went to work.

The result, "Evaluation of the LAPD Community Safety Partnership," utilized a near-battalion of UCLA researchers, data analysts and students (Jeffrey Brantingham of the Department of Anthropology, and Todd Franke and Susana Bonis, both of the Department of Social Welfare, were also listed as lead researchers). It concentrated on CSP work in Nickerson Gardens in Watts and Ramona Gardens in Boyle Heights.

The evaluation, released in the spring, ran 182 pages. It analyzed crime data, and researchers logged more than 100 interviews with residents, held 28 focus groups and conducted 425 hours of ethnographic observation. More than 750 Nickerson Gardens and Ramona Gardens inhabitants shared their opinions in an online survey. Leap, who is also a social worker, noted that residents of the housing complexes were involved in planning the study from the outset; she said it was critical to infuse "resident voice" into the proceedings.

It was a deep dive, but Leap, who is now writing a book based on the evaluation, knew every element was vital for the work to be accepted. "There's no way you're going to transform law enforcement," she said, "without hitting them over the head with the research."

The most salient takeaway was that the police program had met its goal of reducing violence, although it took three years for crime decreases to take effect. Leap said that Brantingham created predictive models, complete with a control group, for CSP sites in Nickerson Gardens and Jordan Downs (both in Watts). He found that the presence of CSP resulted in a reduction of 221 violent incidents over six years; this included seven fewer homicides and 93 fewer aggravated assaults. The report declared that there was a financial benefit to the reduction in crime, saving $14.5 million in tangible costs.

Also important, Leap said, is that crime was not displaced to nearby neighborhoods, as occurs with some crime-suppression efforts. Rice seized on the importance of the finding.

"There's a halo effect, as opposed to, 'We're damaging the adjacent neighborhoods,'" she said. "That was really good to find out."

The surveys and interviews concentrated on CSP's presence in Nickerson Gardens and Ramona Gardens. The evaluation reported that over time, trust of law enforcement increased and a sense of safety emerged, particularly as officers' presence disrupted gang control of public spaces. The study found that residents appreciated police who participated in community endeavors, everything from coaching youth football teams to helping start a Nickerson Gardens walking club that ensured children had a safe path to school. Surveys revealed that residents who reached out to police for help said officers responded quickly.

Leap acknowledges that some critics called the report "copaganda," but it was far from a sugarcoating. The evaluation identified numerous CSP shortfalls, starting with a sense of confusion about its very mission. Some officers were unsure how to meld the aims of reducing crime and increasing trust — and were uncertain about when to make an arrest. Meanwhile, some residents were perplexed about what the program ultimately sought to accomplish.

"The confusion around CSP was stunning," Leap said. "For example, CSP is not the youth safety partnership, it's the Community Safety Partnership, and yet what's really high-profile, understandably with the LAPD, was their working with youth. That's a good thing. But the community was like, wait a minute, this should be all of us. What about the elderly? What about this? What about that?"

Another critique in the evaluation was that many residents felt CSP officers spent too much time helping kids who were interested in interacting with police, while harder-to-reach teenagers were left out.

Leap noted this was not exclusive to CSP — college professors tend to respond most to curious and inquisitive students. To ensure that all who needed support received it, the evaluation suggested that CSP units improve coordination with other entities, including community groups and the mayor's office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development.

Further, the evaluation found that success was patchy. While many residents supported CSP, others were distrustful of law enforcement because their outlook was colored by past interactions and a sense of history. This foreshadowed some opposition to CSP's current expansion; activists said new resources for impoverished neighborhoods should come in the form of social workers and economic aid, rather than more armed police.

Leap's team ultimately offered a battery of recommendations, with overarching aims and 45 specific ideas to improve CSP. The study is a thorough prescription for change, but one that even the authors recognize might not have been embraced were it not for what occurred in Minneapolis on May 25.

THE KILLING OF GEORGE FLOYD sparked a multitude of protests and a nationwide reckoning for police. Proposals in Los Angeles have been varied, including blanket demands to reduce the LAPD's budget by 90%.

It is impossible to say what changes would have come to CSP were Garcetti and Moore not facing a cacophony to alter policing. But Leap's timely evaluation provided scholarly research that showed the CSP program could work — and that it would work even better if top-down changes were made.

Floyd's death, of course, was not the only timely element impacting law enforcement strategy. The coronavirus has sent waves throughout the policing world. In the first month after Garcetti ordered the closure of most bars and restaurants and many other businesses to slow the spread of COVID-19, overall crime fell 29% compared with the same time last year — and Part 1 crimes (violent incidents) decreased by 25.8%, according to LAPD data released by the mayor's office.

The downturn was short-lived. By Aug. 1, the year-over-year decrease was just 8%, and violent crime was only 6.9% below 2019 levels. Further, homicides in 2020 were outpacing the previous year's tally.

WHEN IT CAME TIME TO STAND UP the new LAPD bureau, Moore went back to the CSP program's roots, put Emada Tingirides in charge and promoted her to deputy chief. Tingirides said the CSP Bureau will operate at the 10 current CSP sites, with 10 officers and one sergeant deployed to each location. In the future, she said, the operation will expand.

"What we want to do now is address those 45 recommendations, ensure that our training is completed, that our mission and vision of the bureau is set up," she said in an interview.

No one expects the new bureau to improve policing overnight. Tingirides emphasizes that the LAPD must understand how it has been viewed historically in some predominantly Black and Latina/o communities. Leap and Rice call this a "truth and reconciliation" process that could include apologizing for the department's past and seeking forgiveness as it strives to forge stronger neighborhood partnerships.

Then there is the police side of the equation: While some cops may buy into the CSP vision, the outlook of others is rooted in a more archaic system. "This is tectonic change," Rice said. "To go from gladiator to guardian, you're really rewiring the DNA of how cops think and how they see their jobs."

One advantage, Tingirides said, is that with CSP in existence for a decade, the LAPD does not have to create a new community-policing program. Leap's evaluation is more of a repair manual than an instruction book for building something from scratch.

Tingirides does not pretend that the repairs will be quick or easy. When a new CSP Bureau site opens, for example, it will require a year of community assessment, preparation and officer training.

But she knows where the work must begin — in the communities that are served by the LAPD.

"I think the most important thing is the community," Tingirides said. People must become "aware that this program is meant to be the community working alongside the police to make change, and that we both want the same things."

And then the police and communities must ask: "How do we get there together?" ◤

THE STRUGGLES OF COMMUNITY

PHOTO BY **ROBERTO GUDINO**

UCLA's Ananya Roy fights for change — as a teacher and as an activist

WRITTEN BY
JEAN MERL

WHEN ANANYA ROY WAS OFFERED the opportunity to oversee a new institute dedicated to furthering social justice, she didn't hesitate to leave her UC Berkeley professorship and move to UCLA. "I saw this as an opportunity to think about how the public university can be a key space for making social justice in the world," Roy said in a Zoom interview from her West Hollywood home.

She was drawn by "a very clear sense of mission that comes from a public university," Roy said, appearing before the institute's backdrop, a setting that has come in handy for online meetings and conferences she has conducted from home since the COVID-19 pandemic forced the physical shutdown of hundreds of businesses and institutions, including UCLA.

Little did Roy know, when she arrived at UCLA in 2016 to become the founding director of the Institute on Inequality and Democracy at the Luskin School of Public Affairs, that she would find herself engulfed this year in a twin-crisis-driven living laboratory. Roy and the institute have been swept up in a spring and summer defined by economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic — including a deepening affordable-housing crisis — and the waves of protests brought on by a series of deaths of Black people at the hands of police across the nation.

The cascading sense of crisis that enveloped the United States in those months has led to sharply divergent reactions. Some have demonstrated on behalf of Black lives, others have characterized those protests as threatening or worse. Led by President Trump, some have demanded that "law and order" reclaim the streets in cities such as Portland and Seattle; demonstrators, meanwhile, have pointed to overwhelmingly peaceful protests on matters of long-standing moral urgency.

The clashes laid bare the race-and-poverty-based inequities that have festered in the United States for decades. And the combination meshed squarely with the institute's mission to advance "radical democracy in an unequal world through research, critical thought, and alliances with social movements and racial justice activism."

"Unlike other research centers, this institute, from the start, has had a commitment to enter into partnerships with community organizations," Roy said. "We have worked very hard to think about what are the actual practices to build this kind of partnership and make it real. ... I report to the dean of the Luskin School, but I am accountable to the communities of Los Angeles."

BORN IN CALCUTTA IN 1970, Roy attributes her passion for battling inequalities in the world to her upbringing by parents who instilled in her a "tremendous commitment to learning. She witnessed the "vast inequities" that exist in India as well as other democracies.

She left home at age 18 to attend Mills College in Oakland, then went on to earn advanced degrees from UC Berkeley and became a professor there of city and regional planning and held the distinguished chair in global poverty and practice.

While at Berkeley, she participated in campus protests, worked in many different programs around poverty and social justice and began writing academic books. Her marriage to another faculty member had ended by the time she decided to leave the Bay Area for the UCLA job.

Friends warned she would be unhappy in L.A. but she discovered otherwise. "I love being in Los Angeles," Roy said. "It has such an incredible history of movements, communities and organizations!"

Despite her hectic schedule, Roy tries to find time to talk to her mother, a retired teacher in India, every morning. And even then, she is haunted by events. Roy worries that she wouldn't be able to visit should her mother become ill. Roy has an American passport and could be denied admission because of the pandemic and this country's reckless response, which has rendered it an international pariah.

ROY AND HER INSTITUTE have made housing a priority, and the economic meltdown caused by the pandemic has given this priority an extra urgency. Countless working-class jobs have been lost, many held by people of color. This made an "already terrible" housing shortage even worse, because many who were already struggling to pay their rent faced even graver challenges. A temporary stay against evictions, along with other rent-relief measures, Roy said, have not gone far enough to solve the underlying issues of unaffordable housing.

As the coronavirus pandemic and economic crisis deepened over the summer, the institute produced three research-based

> "THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN CREATING A MORE EQUAL SOCIETY."
>
> — Ananya Roy, director of the UCLA Luskin School's Institute on Inequality and Democracy

reports defining the scope of the problem and suggesting solutions. In the first, "UD Day," (referring to "unlawful detainers," or eviction notices), retired law professor Gary Blasi found that 600,000 households in Los Angeles County used 90% of their income for rent even before the pandemic. Without action by officials, Blasi wrote, many of them faced eviction. Roy has been critical of government inaction. "Now what we face," she said, "is absolutely terrifying."

The second report, "Hotel California," takes officials to task for being too slow to enact a program to pay for hotel rooms to get homeless people off the streets during the pandemic. It calls for use of eminent domain, not just negotiations with hotel owners, to house more people. Noting that many of downtown L.A.'s hotels were built with public subsidies, Roy believes there should be "fair compensation, but commandeering."

"No government in California has been willing to do that," despite having the legal authority to do so, Roy said.

She further expressed her frustration with a tweet later in the summer: "California legislators and political executives are wringing their hands over the impending eviction crisis. It's a crisis of their own making."

The third report, "For the Crisis Yet to Come: Temporary Settlements in the Era of Evictions," calls for temporary sanctions and support services for self-organized communities of homeless living on the streets, but only as a stopgap until they can be housed.

ON MAY 25, MINNEAPOLIS POLICE suffocated George Floyd, the latest in a series of police killings of Black people around the nation. It touched off a storm of protests by Black Lives Matter and others. Two days later, Roy tweeted, "Now, and always, is the time for universities to divest from the murderous apparatus that is the police."

Then a local protest thrust Roy into the center of a controversy on her own campus. She learned that, on June 1, UCLA had allowed the Los Angeles Police Department to use the leased Jackie Robinson Stadium as a holding area for detained protesters. She and 58 other faculty issued a public letter excoriating the university and urging it to cut ties with the LAPD. Roy also tweeted her outrage and soon helped form a committee that seeks to dismantle the campus police and replace it with a more safety-oriented organization.

Intense and determined, Roy in mid-August challenged her own department in a tweet criticizing the Luskin School's support for more money for the LAPD: "When I fight for divestment from policing at UCLA this includes challenging the harm done by university research that continues to legitimize & whitewash policing."

THE MID-MARCH ADVENT OF pandemic-induced shutdowns encouraged Roy to step up an already brisk pace of research projects, conferences and meetings, all now online as she works from home. She also has found time to give media interviews and write opinion pieces. Protest does not rest in a pandemic.

The pandemic has robbed her of going to the gym, her favorite recharging tool, and prevented her from making a trip to India to celebrate her mother's birthday in August. It is her work, she said, that gives her a renewed sense of purpose and the strength to continue.

"It's difficult to do self-care now," Roy said, "but if we have energy and health, we need to use it for good purpose."

Roy said she remains positive and more determined than ever in her work at UCLA. She believes its students, whether coming from poverty or lives of privilege, share a commitment to social justice.

"The public university has a role to play in creating a more equal society," Roy said, explaining why she has spent her career at the University of California despite opportunities to work elsewhere.

"All the troublemaking I did" in challenging UCLA's administration over policing and, years earlier, budget protests at Berkeley, were "because this is the university I love."

"At the center of it all," Roy added, "I'm a teacher, I'm a scholar, and I'm totally committed to this endeavor of the university."

WHITHER

POLITICS?

Winning support and tallying votes during a pandemic

WRITTEN BY
BILL BOYARSKY

PHOTO BY **TIFFANY TERTIPES / UNSPLASH**

> "AMERICANS CAN NO LONGER TAKE FOR GRANTED THAT ELECTION LOSERS WILL CONCEDE A CLOSELY FOUGHT ELECTION AFTER ELECTION AUTHORITIES (OR COURTS) HAVE DECLARED A WINNER."
>
> *— Report of the Ad Hoc Committee for 2020 Election Fairness and Integrity*

A WIDE STRETCH OF SUBURBIA north of Los Angeles, reaching from hills near the Pacific Ocean to the desert, is a perfect laboratory for examining how COVID-19 is changing politics and governance in the United States. What it reveals is distressing.

Officially, this is California's 25th Congressional District. It reflects much of the state and, indeed, the nation. Homes range from affluent to modest. They are evidence of societal stability and economic striving. There are two state correctional institutions in the area, one in the district and the other nearby. They are evidence of misery and danger. This is Middle America, only an hour from my home in the city.

I have been drawn to this place over the years to report on the Great Recession and other national crises. What I found now is that the coronavirus pandemic is not only damaging national health but also threatening the process that is the lifeblood of democracy — voting.

As I studied the district and the impact of the pandemic elsewhere, I wondered whether this country would accept the results of voting held under such extraordinary circumstances. That may be the most important question of the November election.

THE 25TH DISTRICT IS FEELING all the pressures of COVID-19. Without warning, the pandemic has changed expectations of voting behavior. Because of the pandemic, people will want to avoid polling-place crowds. Poll workers tend to be older and more susceptible to the virus. They may be reluctant to sign up. Voting in a neighborhood booth might be a thing of the past.

A shortage of experienced workers, the closing of many polling places and new computerized vote-counting systems with potential flaws have already led to long lines in recent elections. Counting the vote may stretch into days or weeks. In the November election, these obstacles could prevent untold numbers of Americans from casting ballots or having their votes counted.

In addition, there have been the constant, overheated attacks on the electoral system by President Donald Trump, who has portrayed the process, especially voting by mail, as crooked. He declared, without offering any evidence, that the 2020 election "will be, in my opinion, the most corrupt election in the history of our country, and we cannot let this happen." Actually, voting by mail has been remarkably clean, according to almost all studies.

To make matters even more chaotic, Trump has suggested that the election be delayed. And he is cutting the budget of the United States Postal Service, crucial to mail-in voting.

The 25th District is typical of the mostly White areas Trump is targeting with his warnings that Democrats want to destroy the suburban lifestyle. The district has 714,313 people; 404,306 of them are registered voters. Of the population, 63.7% is White, 37.9% Latina/o, 8% Asian and 7.7% Black. By registration, 36.48% are Democrats, and 31.67% are Republicans. It is a middle-class district, with a median income of $68,551. College graduates are a 25.8% minority. Four years ago, Hilary Clinton defeated Trump here by 50% to 43%.

In 2018, Democrat Katie Hill was elected to Congress but resigned amid accusations of sexual

misconduct. In a special election to replace her, Republican Mike Garcia defeated Democrat Christy Smith, and he is completing the rest of Hill's term. They will face off again on Nov. 3.

Like the rest of Los Angeles County, the 25th District has been hit hard by COVID-19. Among its comparatively small population centers, Palmdale had almost 3,000 cases, Santa Clarita almost 2,500 and Lancaster about 2,400. In Los Angeles County, cases total more than 215,000.

When Republican Garcia won in the special election, there was a large vote by mail. In fact, that is how most voters, aware of the pandemic, cast ballots. In California, as in a small number of other states, each registered voter is mailed a ballot, which is to be filled out, then mailed, turned in at a drop-off spot or left at a polling place. A variation of this, used in more states, is an absentee ballot, where the voter must request one.

Republicans in the 25th District in particular were receptive to voting by mail. County officials mailed 135,342 ballots to Republicans and 46% were returned, according to the data collection firm Political Data Inc. Of the 164,993 mailed to Democrats, 32% were returned.

Older voters were more diligent about returning their ballots — 56% for those 65 and older, in contrast to 40% for those 50 to 64.

These figures and Republican Garcia's victory in the special election on mailed-in ballots show how out of step Trump is with the GOP electorate in the 25th District. By attacking mail-in voting, Trump is going against what he perceives to be his base — older Republicans.

ROB STUTZMAN, A REPUBLICAN CAMPAIGN consultant and Trump skeptic, has written in the Washington Post that, while "it's never wise to draw big conclusions from one-off events, the clear lesson in California's 25th Congressional District is this: It is time for Republicans to get on the vote-by-mail train. The race in Southern California suggests that voting by mail can help Republicans win."

Republicans, Stutzman said, have been active voters by mail for years. Part of the reason is generational. Republican voters are older and frequent users of the mail. "They still mail Christmas cards," he said.

Then why, I asked him on the phone, does President Trump oppose vote-by-mail?

"He wants to present narratives to cast doubt on an election that he will lose," Stutzman said, and to "create doubt among millions of Americans that it was a legitimate election. I think it is really important to push back on this."

Women and men doing the important work of running elections aren't well known to the public. Immersion in the mechanics of voting has not been a road to fame. It is regarded as the work of nerds.

But the mechanics of elections, it is clear in the 25th District, are just as important as the glamour of the campaign trail and the excitement of watching the results on election night. More election-process experts are needed to avoid a new crisis.

One such effort is the UCLA Voting Rights Project, part of the university's Latino Policy and Politics Initiative. It was founded in 2018 by civil rights attorney Chad W. Dunn, a UCLA law school faculty member, and Professor Matt Barreto, a UCLA political scientist and an expert on political behavior. Their goal is to bring new people into the little-known elections field and, as their website puts it, to train young lawyers and expert witnesses in voting-rights litigation, develop new theories to pursue voting-rights cases and advance "voting rights through national and local policy."

As the coronavirus spread early this year, it seemed certain to Barreto, Dunn and their colleagues that the pandemic would immediately influence campaigns and elections, where people are in close contact at rallies, precinct walking and meeting candidates, as well as voting. COVID-19, with its devastating impact on communities of color, would be a new obstacle, and a big one.

"Given the urgency and importance of the fair and safe administration of the 2020 general election," the Voting Rights Project reported, "states and Congress must act immediately to address the significant and novel challenges posed by COVID-19 … [or] interpersonal contact avoidance will persist in discouraging large-crowd, in-person voting for some time."

PHOTO BY **TIFFANY TERTIPES / UNSPLASH**

The project's most significant recommendation was for voting by mail, which had become so important in the 25th District. "The federal government must mandate that any state receiving COVID-19 or other relief funds should prepare to allow all eligible voters to vote by mail. … In addition, safe and expanded in-person voting should continue within guidelines recommended by public health professionals."

ANOTHER MAJOR STUDY was led by one of the nation's foremost election authorities, Professor Richard Hasen of the University of California, Irvine, who convened leading scholars and election experts to discuss how to assure that the 2020 election will be accepted by the public. Hasen's latest book, *Election Meltdown: Dirty Tricks, Distrust and the Threat to American Democracy*, shows the damage inflicted on elections by Republican voter suppression, aimed at reducing the Democratic vote; incompetent election administration, often in Democrat-run big cities; and both high-tech and old-fashioned dirty tricks.

Hasen's group formed the Ad Hoc Committee for 2020 Election Fairness and Integrity, consisting of more than two dozen academics from universities including Princeton, MIT, Stanford and UC Berkeley. It raised the most troubling question of the election: Will the results be accepted by the public?

"Even before the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic arrived in the United States, close observers of American democracy worried about the public's faith and confidence in the results of the upcoming November 2020 U.S. elections," the group reported. "Although a decade ago concerns about peaceful transitions of power were less common, Americans can no longer take for granted that election losers will concede a closely fought election after election authorities (or courts) have declared a winner.

"Current American politics feature severe hyperpolarization and an increasingly partisan media and social media environment. Mistrust is high. It is harder for voters to get reliable political information. Incendiary rhetoric about rigged or stolen elections is on the rise, and unsubstantiated claims of rigged elections find a receptive audience especially among those who are on the losing end of the election. American elections are highly decentralized, leaving pockets of weak election administration, which can further undermine voter confidence in the process. The COVID-19 pandemic, which hit the United States hard beginning in March 2020, has only exacerbated concerns about the fairness and integrity of the 2020 elections."

> "EVEN BEFORE THE WORLDWIDE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ARRIVED IN THE UNITED STATES, CLOSE OBSERVERS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY WORRIED ABOUT THE PUBLIC'S FAITH AND CONFIDENCE IN THE RESULTS OF THE UPCOMING NOVEMBER 2020 U.S. ELECTIONS."
>
> *— Report of the Ad Hoc Committee for 2020 Election Fairness and Integrity*

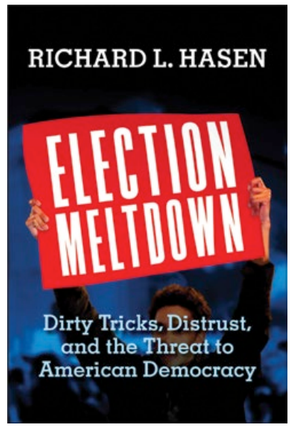
The committee said partisan divisions about whether vote-by-mail should be encouraged have been exacerbated by new concerns about the financial viability of the U.S. Postal Service, which delivers mail-in ballots. "Further, it is easy to imagine election misinformation related to the virus — such as false information about the safety of voting machines, polling place closures, or election delays — confusing voters and potentially undermining voters' confidence that a fair election may be conducted. … It appears that virus-related concerns will put extra strain on already stretched election administrators seeking to conduct elections in a fair, safe, and inclusive manner and in a way that will lead American voters to have confidence in the vote count."

The group's most original suggestion was election lessons for journalists. It recommended "training and coverage planning to help reporters and media outlets appropriately set expectations before the election and to accurately report on events as they develop. These efforts are likely to provide the strongest defense against misinformation about the electoral process or false allegations of widespread voter fraud, which media outlets should of course also seek to avoid amplifying."

The academics also recommended ending the traditional race among reporters to be first with the results on election night. Be willing, the committee said, to explain that it is too early to call a race, and that a slow count means officials are being careful. "Forecasts and exit poll projections are frequently incorrect; avoid emphasizing them for fear of affecting turnout or causing unfounded suspicions of fraud if they miss the mark." The group urged reporters to explain that shifts in vote margins are routine while mail-in ballots are counted — and are not indicative of fraud. It also asked them to explain that vote counts continuing beyond election day are normal, and that errors and delays are not necessarily indicators of nefarious intent.

This places a heavy responsibility upon journalists, especially old-school reporters who say their only job is to report the news. But this election will ask much from everyone — senior citizens summoning the courage to run a polling place in the 25th Congressional District, election officials working seven days a week to avoid an election-day disaster, and politicians who must be calming rather than disruptive influences.

All of us have important roles in preserving democracy during the singular age of COVID-19. ◤



RICHARD HASEN'S LATEST BOOK EXAMINES VOTER SUPPRESSION AND OTHER EFFORTS TO UNDERMINE AMERICAN VOTING.

ILLUSTRATION BY **NOMA BAR**

SAFETY: ASKING THE BIG QUESTIONS

The movement to alter American policing is underway. Its fate is uncertain

WRITTEN BY
KENNY HERZOG

THE IDEA OF DRASTICALLY REDUCING or even abolishing police forces as America has known them is not new, but in the months since George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis, it has matured into a debate that might help shape the way the country reckons with centuries of racial bias. It's a momentous back-and-forth for the body politic to consider, but when a country carries this much baggage, there's going to be a lot to unpack.

Lorenzo Jones is not new to these questions. Jones is the co-founder and co-executive director of the Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice, an advocacy group focused on ending mass criminalization and helping neighborhoods organize. The Chicago native has served as executive director for the Hartford, Connecticut-based criminal-justice reform group A Better Way Foundation and has consulted for numerous like-minded nationwide campaigns. Connecting from his Hartford home, Jones's Zoom background reads: "They need to entangle Breonna Taylor's killers in handcuffs," referring to the March shooting of 26-year-old Taylor in her home. Taylor was killed by Louisville Metro cops acting on bad information; demands for action against those officers have become a rallying point for police critics, including Democratic vice presidential candidate and California Sen. Kamala Harris.

Those demands, which have reverberated through Southern California and beyond, echoed loudly for Jones, whose family has been touched by the consequences of official indifference and disregard. His sister Shaun battled mental illness and addiction, and was not caught in a rehabilitative safety net. Instead, she became involved in sex work, and was looked at by law enforcement as someone to be dealt with punitively, not compassionately. Jones admits that it took him years to believe his sister when she'd insist that there were no treatment programs willing to accept her. Shaun eventually died — killed by a combination of HIV, diabetes and bipolar disorder. To Jones, her story is illustrative of how policing too often fails — by seeing those it connects with only in terms of their crimes and their race and in the process eroding trust in neighborhoods and nuclear families.

"The embarrassment and guilt of having not believed her connects to the work for me, an organizer, by forcing me to give people the benefit of the doubt," he said. "If I had given my sister the benefit of the doubt every time, I don't know how it would have been different. And I feel like a lot of families go through that."

JONES KNOWS THESE ISSUES PERSONALLY, but also politically. And that sometimes creates ambivalence. Jones, for instance, is sympathetic to those who demand police abolition but conflicted about whether pushing for it is sound political strategy. (He describes himself as "a more practical type.") Nor is he surprised that Joe Biden and other senior Democratic leaders demurred on explicit demands to defund police. In his view, the fact

> “THE SOCIAL EXPERIMENT THAT IS AMERICA HAS RUN OUT OF WILLING PARTICIPANTS TO SACRIFICE THEMSELVES. IF WE HAD A SYSTEM THAT PRIORITIZED PUBLIC HEALTH, THEN WE’D HAVE A VERY DIFFERENT CONVERSATION ABOUT PUBLIC SAFETY.”
>
> *— Lorenzo Jones, co-executive director of the Katal Center for Health, Equity and Justice*

that these are very real calculations that presidential candidates need to make is evidence that the country is in what Jones calls “the death throes” of moderate progress.

“The abolitionist position here is not the finite position,” he said. “It’s on a continuum. That’s the challenge here: People have acted as if the demand to abolish things that are bad is the macro version of cancel culture. Sometimes, it’s well deserved. Other times, it’s not very realistic. Nobody’s canceling Donald Trump, because you can’t cancel out the president. The way that you do it is like any warfare. There’s a reconnaissance period where you just start to starve them. If you were to start to undo the police department’s role, reallocating those responsibilities to the appropriate agency, we’re having a much more lean and cleaner conversation that’s about what we actually have, not what we necessarily want.”

That template — reconsidering the place of police and thinking freshly about institutional and historical relationships, against the backdrop of a presidency that has inflamed tensions and divisions — runs through the national debate over race and society. It is being widely debated in academic and activist circles. This summer at UCLA, for instance, faculty at the law school discussed questions such as the interplay of social movements and legal change, the place of the United States in international policing law and practices, and the viability of specific reforms, such as eliminating the immunity that police officers enjoy from most lawsuits arising from their work (so-called “qualified immunity”). On the ground, activists have pressed the case, too, securing a promise of substantial budget cuts to the LAPD and pushing Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti to forcefully address the need for reforms, including calls for “defunding” the department. Garcetti has not, however, entertained the idea of abolishing the LAPD.

This gets to the core of what makes the case for abolition so complex. Even in a scenario where police and local leadership are amenable to funding social workers who can mediate domestic disputes or addiction specialists who can respond to incidents involving drug abuse, there are questions as to whether anyone but an armed officer should be asked to put their lives on the line. But when, according to online data compiler Mapping Police Violence, nearly 30% of Americans who were killed by police since 2013 are Black, despite making up 13% of the population, how could anyone argue against the need for radical reconsideration? Some kind of template for a different way?

“I don’t know if I’ve ever seen a police state that I would accept,” said Jones, though he then proceeded to outline what one might look like. “It would be as small as possible, it would be as surgically useful as possible, and it would be much more of an investigative agency then an enforcement agency. The police chief would also be the deputy commissioner of public health.

“Imagine if what the police did was actually solve crimes instead of enforce laws,” he added. “What we’re trying to solve here is the appropriateness of a role. You have to understand the culture and climate of neighborhoods to appreciate the value of the librarian in the neighborhood, the crossing guard in that neighborhood. You have all these other people who have existing relationships that police will never have. There are so many options between arguing for the police continuing to do what they’ve been doing.”

CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY, IS A BLUE-COLLAR city of nearly 80,000 about five miles from Philadelphia. By the early 2010s, it had devolved from a bustling manufacturing hub to a scene of blight and decay, punished by rising crime and torn over who was to blame. Frustrations boiled over between local legislators and the powerful Camden Police Department union, which city officials accused of instilling complacency among its rank-and-file. In May 2013, the city formally dissolved the Camden Police Department, terminated hundreds of officers and agreed to the development of a new countywide

force staffed with non-union officers who were supposed to integrate themselves more deeply into communities rather than aggressively ticketing and arresting for minor offenses. It was a strategy that contained elements of broken-windows deterrence, “neighborhood policing” and what would now be called “defunding.”

Seven years later, crime has gone down, and anecdotal reports of improved relations between police and residents are encouraging. But benevolent authority is still authority. Nor does the new model do much to address racial biases or the disconnect between community members and the forces patrolling their streets.

“Every city is its own fiefdom, and the people in those municipalities must drive for police reform,” said Jones, for whom the Camden model falls short. “Systemic racism and misogyny are real inside of law enforcement. If the police are leading the plan to reform themselves, nobody will take it to heart. Camden, like any other municipality trying to take this on, continues to have the police drive the plan.”

MOREOVER, CAMDEN IS JUST ONE CASE STUDY. Others have pursued different paths and produced results worth considering.

In 1991, four Los Angeles police officers beat Rodney King into submission in a dark corner of Lake View Terrace. The videotape that captured the event riveted national attention on the issue of police brutality, and Los Angeles embarked on a long and difficult period of reform that required funding, not defunding, the LAPD. Today’s LAPD is bigger, better equipped and far more diverse than that in 1992 — almost no institution in America better reflects the diversity of its community, at least a community as diverse as Los Angeles. Crime has declined precipitously, and Los Angeles has vastly improved systems for receiving and investigating complaints against officers, as well as tracking those whose conduct arouses suspicion. Civilian control of the department is far more secure and established today than in the rocky days after the King beating, when the mayor and police chief jockeyed for control.

But critics of the LAPD still see a department steeped in notions of violence, in the assumption that police are the right people to respond to issues better left to social workers or addiction specialists or mental health experts. The department itself may be more diverse, but its ethos, at least to its critics, is derived from a history of racial repression. It has reformed — no serious person can claim that today’s LAPD is not a changed institution from that of the early 1990s — but some see that as far too little and demand new thinking.

AS AMERICA GRAPPLES with its current round of police violence and the reactions to it, the demand to defund the police — even in the measured way that Camden has attempted it — places local officials in a tough spot politically. Many are sympathetic to programs that would reduce police contacts with wary residents, but they also face tough opposition from police unions and public safety advocates ready to pounce on any proposal that endangers the lives of residents or the livelihoods of officers.

They confront the realities of police and public safety funding, which can be subtly organized to perpetuate certain systems and discourage reform. Specifically, Jones points to Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs), a program enacted by President Gerald Ford as a linchpin of his 1974 Housing and Community Development Act. Overseen by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, CDBGs are essentially funds carved out for communities in need, though exactly how they’re allocated is determined by each respective municipality. Police departments are influential in that process.

“We’ve all heard that local police are incentivized to make arrests, like stop-and-frisk,” Jones said. “But the police department primarily justifies its budget through calls for service, so the more calls they get, the more that proves you need police. Police put together a deployment plan for their city based on the tax base and the resources they have. What’s happened — and this is welfare reform, this is the Clinton crime bill [Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994] — is that the federal government restructures block grants. Once the money gets to a place like Illinois, it gets distributed through the state legislature. So the agreement is that the money primarily goes to police departments or through some law enforcement entity that ultimately signs the check that releases the money to a community.”

Benefits of CDBGs do trickle down to the most disadvantaged populations. They supply money for struggling business districts, for instance, and sometimes offer resources to help the homeless create or maintain HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. But Jones and others argue that if this money were granted directly to grassroots neighborhood organizations, there would be an infrastructure for legitimizing school social workers or local pastors as qualified liaisons to augment the police’s pursuit of solving crimes that have already happened. In effect, it would be a communitywide deputizing that could reshape accountability.

Looking to other nations as a guide is useful, to a point. Norway, for instance, is often cited as a model of effective, community-conscious policing. A centralized federal force oversees officers who do not carry guns. Police have fatally shot fewer than five Norwegians since 2002. That’s an appealing contrast to the United States, where the drumbeat of police shootings has fueled the current wave of national protest.

But reforming American policing is not as simple as importing another set of rules. The United States does not have a national police force; it is home to more than 17,000 law enforcement agencies, from the mammoth NYPD to small-town departments with just a few officers. Some departments are highly sophisticated, with extensive training divisions, specialized units and elaborate systems of civilian oversight. Some departments enjoy gentle relations with their communities. Others, notably the LAPD, have been through wrenching periods of conflict and reform. Norway may handle its policing well, but it’s hard to imagine copying its success in the United States.

“I’ve had these conversations in a lot of languages,” Jones said, “All these other places are predicated on a thing that their system is built on, which is not necessarily a homogeneity of everyone being White. But we only have that White model in America. … What those other countries have is a system predicated on public health as a civil right, as a human right. The social experiment that is America has run out of willing participants to sacrifice themselves. If we had a system that prioritized public health, then we’d have a very different conversation about public safety.”

Back in Minneapolis, where George Floyd was killed at the outset of this eventful summer, the city council has attempted to learn from Camden while also hearing from a worldwide coalition of Black Lives Matter protesters and supporters. Meanwhile, the coronavirus pandemic and this year’s presidential election have given the police-reform debate both context and urgency. Jones, however, has been at the vanguard of numerous, kindred groundswells for change, regardless of the timeline or hierarchy of influence. He is more convinced than ever that change is coming.

“I’m going to split a hair here,” he acknowledged. “If I could see a path to abolition outside of cutting down the vines in front of us, I would jump on that tomorrow. I definitely am not going to try to get in the way, and am even willing to be the whipping posts for some abolitionists. I appreciate what they’re trying to do, but with the number of years I’ve got on the earth, I feel like the best way for me to do it as to be as purposeful and processed as I can. I’m willing to take criticism for that, because at the end of the day, that’s where I’m hoping we end up: abolitionism and reconstruction.”

BLUEPRINT
SPECIAL
REPORT
A Closer Look

The League

Dedicated to fairness and nonpartisanship, the League of Women voters navigates an era of division and suspicion

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS IN ACTION — MARCHING, PROTESTING, VOTING.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF **THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS**

WRITTEN BY
MOLLY SELVIN

STEPHANIE GOMEZ WAS 19 WHEN, as she tells it, "I was discovered by the League of Women Voters."

A rising sophomore at Mount St. Mary's University, she was staffing an American Lung Association table at a 2016 voter-education forum sponsored by the Los Angeles branch of the League. On the state ballot was a $2-a-pack cigarette tax (which passed). Crissi Avila, co-president of the L.A. League, dropped by and introduced herself. "She invited me to the League's annual meeting."

Gomez, a Latinx woman, was interested in politics but nervous about attending. She went anyway and liked what she found. She joined and has become an evangelist for the League, whose members have long been typically much older and White. At 23, Gomez sits on its L.A. board of directors, chairs its L.A. nominating committee and has started a chapter at her alma mater. A first-generation college graduate whose wide smile colors her voice, she credits the League with teaching her leadership skills and "how people can work together."

"I see myself staying in the League indefinitely," she said. "I rave about it."

A century after its founding, the survival of the League of Women Voters as a relevant, thriving community depends upon change, especially during this time of partisan division, the COVID-19 pandemic and angry protests against racism. The League is evolving from a mostly White organization founded to encourage women to exercise their newly won suffrage into a more ethnically diverse assembly that attracts young men as well as young women — like Stephanie Gomez, with her energy and enthusiasm.

Its future may hang equally on whether the League's values — nonpartisan civic education, respectful debate and encouraging every citizen to vote — still resonate in these highly partisan times.

The League's mission statement — "Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy." — is no radical manifesto. But escalating efforts to suppress voter turnout by purging registration rolls and imposing identification requirements, together with moves by President Trump and his Republican allies to sharply limit mail-in balloting, are hammering the League with new challenges to its bedrock belief that all citizens should be able to vote.

In contrast to the sugar rush of policymaking by tweet, League volunteers persevere in the face of such challenges, still shouldering the slow, unheralded but increasingly important work of studying policy options and building consensus so vital to a healthy democracy.

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS was founded months before passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 to help women exercise their new rights as voters. Photos from early League events show members in stylish fur-collared coats and cloche hats with pearls around their necks. These members helped cement the narrative of suffrage being the work of middle- and upper-class White women, a storyline that has long dogged the group.

In truth, the path to ratification of the 19th Amendment "was complicated, and sometimes ugly," Virginia Kase, chief executive officer of the League, wrote last year in an op-ed in The Hill. African American and Native women were an essential part of the effort, but suffrage leaders, including League founder Carrie Chapman Catt, helped win Southern support by agreeing not to challenge Jim Crow racism, allaying fears that Black voters might outnumber White voters.

As a result, "the League has had its own internal problems advocating for civil rights and the inclusion of women of color in its ranks," said Delores Johnson Hurt, president of the Charlotte/Mecklenburg, North Carolina, League, only the second African American to head that chapter.

Early League meetings were safe places for women eager to learn about their new rights — sometimes despite their husbands' opposition. During those first decades, the League quickly established its reputation for fairness, careful research on issues and candidates, and for promoting old-fashioned values like restrained but serious debate and discussion.

Those principles remain central League tenets, noted Raphael Sonenshein, executive director of the Pat Brown Institute for Public Affairs at Cal State L.A. "They can't deliver voters, they can't deliver endorsements, they can't deliver money. What they can deliver is moral authority."

Membership peaked in the 1960s as women, many with college educations, sought avenues for civic involvement. "They were also just tired of talking to children all day and happy to get out of

the house," said Raquel Beltrán, former executive director of the L.A. League, who now directs the city Department of Neighborhood Empowerment. Former Los Angeles Councilwoman Joy Picus credited the League with teaching her leadership skills, Beltrán, said, and with giving Picus the confidence to seek elected office.

However, as more women entered the workforce, beginning in the 1970s, membership began a slow slide to a low point in the 1990s.

A charter change in 1973 welcomed men. The League does not keep data on the race, ethnicity or gender of members, but its leaders attribute an increase in younger members, like Stephanie Gomez, to a recent diversity initiative. "Strides have been made," said Helen Hutchison, past president of the California League, "but we still don't represent the population as a whole."

League membership also tends be cyclical, rising in advance of presidential elections and falling afterward. However, membership in state and local chapters has leaped by 33% since Trump's election, climbing in cities as well as in rural and suburban chapters — and in college and high school chapters. League chapters now count a total of 500,000 members and "supporters," who include donors and occasional volunteers.

"THE LEAGUE WAS FOUNDED BY WOMEN WHO DID MILITANT ADVOCACY. WE'VE HELD OUR POSITIONS FOR DECADES."

— Chris Carson, former national president of the League of Women Voters

OLD-FASHIONED CIVICS education and voter information, updated to the digital age, have remained the League's bread-and-butter for a century. Behind this continued activity is a fervent, now almost quaint, faith in the power of working together to solve common problems. "I can patch the pothole in front of my house," Hutchison said. "But doesn't it make more sense to join with my neighbors in asking the city to resurface the whole street?"

To that end, volunteers from the League's 750 chapters speak regularly to community groups and corporations about the basics of how government works. They register new voters at high schools and community colleges; they explain the voting process and how voters should make decisions. And as elections approach, the League publishes candidate profiles and exhaustive pro and con arguments for pending ballot measures.

The League's Vote411.org website, launched in 2006, is another tool for voters, a "one-stop-shop" in every state for factual information on registration, absentee ballots and polling places, as well as candidates. California voters can also access VotersEdge.org, a nonpartisan online guide to federal, state and local races. It is a joint project of the League and Maplight, a nonpartisan nonprofit that tracks money's influence on politics.

Fairness and nonpartisanship are the League's civic religion. The group sponsored nationally televised presidential debates in 1976, 1980 and 1984. But tellingly, the League withdrew its imprimatur when candidates began demanding what it considered partisan debate conditions. Local chapters have run debates with candidates for U.S. Senate, L.A. mayor, County Board of Supervisors and L.A. neighborhood councils.

In 2015, the L.A. League helped organize a discussion of a proposed extension of the 710 Freeway, long a contentious issue. It drew more than 200 residents. Sonenshein, whose Pat Brown Institute co-sponsored the event, worried that the discussion would degenerate into a shouting match — or worse. He credits League members stationed around the auditorium with keeping tempers in check. "Everyone underestimates the League," he said, but "when they do an event, they have a certain level of trust that doesn't fit the image of being irrelevant."

Issue advocacy has become another League hallmark. Since the 1950s, the group has taken formal positions on major hot-button issues like gun violence, reproductive rights and the Affordable Care Act. The positions generally skew progressive, adopted after sometimes years of research and deliberation. State and local chapters may also weigh in on state and local ballot measures.

Proposition 15, the Schools and Communities First measure on California's November ballot, is a current priority. The measure would amend Proposition 13, which voters passed in 1978, by taxing most commercial and industrial properties at market rate, based on regular reassessments. The estimated $12 billion a year in additional property tax revenue would help fund schools and local government services such as libraries, road maintenance and public health services, all of which have been increasingly strapped.

The League's support for Proposition 15 is grounded in years of study by volunteers on state and local finance, followed by discussions in chapters up and down the state. However, some see an inconsistency. Bob Stern, a League member and former president of the Center for Governmental Studies, a policy research group, calls the League a "truly nonpartisan place to go for facts. ... But at the same time, the League is taking positions. How can they be nonpartisan and take positions? I'm not sure they can say they're both."

"Well, I totally dispute that," countered Chris Carson, a former national president of the League. "The League was founded by women who did militant advocacy. We've held our positions for decades," and until recently, she said, those positions "were gosh-gee, ho-hum. Suddenly they're partisan.

"No, they're not."

AS THE NATION NEARS a climax in partisanship — the November election — it faces profound challenges to election integrity, including foreign interference, disinformation, the new hurdles to voting and problems with vote counting.

In response, the League is doubling down on its already prodigious voter education activities. And it is not shy about pressing its concerns in court. As of June 30, the League was a plaintiff or an amicus party in at least 15 cases involving mail-in balloting, several generated by the risk of coronavirus infection that in-person voting rules pose in many states.

"It's not their model to litigate their issues, but when they can't do their work and voting is being unfairly restricted, it seems like they take action," said Anne Houghtaling, deputy director of the Thurgood Marshall Institute at the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. The ACLU and the Brennan Center for Justice, along with the NAACP, often partner with the League on these cases.

Many of these lawsuits target Southern states where "who votes and how we vote have always been politicized," said Delores Johnson Hurt, the Charlotte/Mecklenburg League president. The Supreme Court's 2013 decision invalidating a key provision of the 1964 Voting Rights Act, she said, has only drawn more attention to current voter suppression efforts and their effects.

In the midst of these issues, building membership and edging away from the League's volunteer-based model remain urgent concerns.

Unlike the Sierra Club or AARP, "the League was built on the unpaid labor of women," said Helen Hutchison, the California League past president. The state League, with six paid staff members, is unusual; in most chapters, volunteers do everything from educating voters to fixing copying machines. "We have to change the [national] model," Hutchison said, which means more fundraising to hire more staff.

At the same time, increasing membership means improving diversity. The League's ongoing partnerships with the YMCA, NAACP and other groups to co-host programs or pursue litigation have helped. "You build a relationship," Chris Carson said, "and then people join." Carson's successor, Deborah Turner, is the second African American to head the league nationally.

Diversity is "not just the catchphrase of the moment," Turner said, in her inaugural address to the League's 100th convention Zoom audience. "Without it, we will at best move sideways and, at worst, take a step back."

IN ITS FIRST half century, the League of Women Voters focused on educating women about suffrage. Entering its second century, the League now sees participatory citizenship as the ongoing duty of all Americans, men and women, young and old — a duty that doesn't end with marking a ballot.

In these fractious times, League volunteers are betting that their steady, quiet focus on the nuts and bolts of democracy is more valuable than ever. The League is "a hearty perennial," said Sonenshein. "It's never out of fashion.

"It's never not necessary."

INTERVIEW BY
JIM NEWTON

POLITICAL WARRIOR

Adam Schiff, nemesis of President Trump and respected Southern California congressman, considers a nation in crisis

PHOTO BY **DAVID BUTOW**

ADAM SCHIFF WAS ELECTED to the United States Congress in 2000, when he defeated Jim Rogan, a Republican incumbent whose support for the impeachment of President Bill Clinton left him vulnerable to a challenge from a Democrat. Twenty years later, Schiff took the lead role in the impeachment of President Donald Trump, a cause that did nothing to diminish his standing in his heavily Democratic, Southern California district. It also made him a national figure, both beloved and polarizing. Throughout the impeachment proceedings, Trump taunted and belittled him.

The impeachment was soon followed by a global pandemic, an economic collapse and a fierce national debate over racial justice, particularly in policing. The juxtaposition of those three crises, all cresting in Trump's fourth year as president, have raised grave questions about political division and the future of the country.

Schiff, a longtime legislator, former federal prosecutor and graduate of Stanford University and Harvard Law School, discussed these and other issues with Blueprint editor-in-chief Jim Newton during a Zoom call this summer.

Blueprint: Let's start with division. Every time someone tells me the country has never been more divided, I flash to the Civil War and realize it's not really true. But this does feel like an extraordinary time. ... I'm curious, from your perspective, how critical is this moment, and how does it stack up historically?
Adam Schiff: It's interesting that you make that comparison to the Civil War. I draw the same analogies when people either say, "We've never been more divided," or "We've never been through a more difficult time." I point out that we've been through two world wars, the Korean War, the Great Depression. ...

The analogy that I more often draw is between now and Vietnam. We were bitterly divided as a nation during Vietnam. We were losing tens of thousands of Americans in the conflict. There were ... shootings on a college campus. Those were very traumatic times also. And we survived them. We will survive ... this period of great consternation and division in this country. I do derive some solace from the fact that we have overcome more difficult divisions in the past. ... Our country, like most, has its cycles of great unity and its cycles of great division. We are in a very difficult, wrenching time right now. ...

Much of this predates Donald Trump. It was owing really to two different revolutions going on simultaneously — a revolution in the economy, every bit as significant as the industrial revolution, in how the workplace is changing, with automation and globalization, meaning that millions of people at home and abroad were losing their jobs through no fault of their own, and much of the middle class was feeling the ground slip away beneath its feet. ... That was also coupled with an information revolution no less significant than the invention of the printing press, which we had centuries to get used to, [while] this we've only had a matter of a few years. It will take us real time to acclimate to an environment where fear and lies travel far faster than truth or love, and in which the algorithms amplify our divisions.

That predated Donald Trump, but like the capable arsonist that he is, he has poured fuel on the fire of our divisions and made them far worse. This too shall pass, but not without a lot of damage in the meantime.

BP: As I watch his rallies, I'm struck by the fact that, while he is undoubtedly a source of great division, President Trump is a magnet as well as a perpetrator. I'm thinking about the moment where someone in the crowd in Phoenix shouted out "Kung Flu." When he leaves office, does this atmosphere leave with him?

AS: I remember when, a few weeks into his presidency, it became clear what kind of a president he was going to be. I began talking about how the apparent and enormous flaws in his character were infecting the whole of government. You were seeing it influence different agencies, to their detriment.

But it wasn't until I watched the rally he did after Dr. Ford testified about her sexual assault, where he was mocking her and the crowd was just thrilled, laughing at her, that I realized something. [In 2018, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford told the Senate Judiciary Committee that Brett Kavanaugh, then a Trump nominee to the Supreme Court, had sexually assaulted her when both were in high school.] I remember thinking that she had testified that the hardest thing for her was the idea that she would be mocked, and here she was, being mocked. I thought to myself: OK, the infection has gone well beyond the government. The president has now infected the whole country. ...

These were pre-existing veins of ugliness that he played on, and so it's not as if that sentiment wasn't out there in the country to be tapped. It was. And for that reason, when he leaves, it will not leave with him. But the person at the top really does have a dramatic influence on the tone of the country, and much of that tone has changed to reflect the same indecency that we see from him.

So, when he goes and we have a new president who has a sense of decency, I think that will go a long way toward healing the country, but I do think he has established a model now that politically was very successful, that others will emulate, and so someone will, for the foreseeable future, try to run in the Donald Trump lane, which means fuel division, play on issues of race and demagogue, propagate deliberate falsehoods and attack the media or any other institution that tries to hold him accountable.

There will be a long tail, sadly. It will be made longer if the president loses and decides to maintain his disruptive conduct as a private citizen. If he loses, he will be the same aggrieved human being that he is now...

BP: It goes without saying, really...
AS: But he will carry that grief to the four corners of the planet. So, I think that the size of his repudiation will also determine how long it will take us to recover.

BP: You probably are the best person to consider the threat of foreign interference to the upcoming election. At the same time, the president seems to be very studiously laying the groundwork for the idea that mail-in ballots or the virus may cast some doubt on the results. Does that suggest that both sides are in a position to be reluctant to accept the results of this election?
AS: That would be terribly unhealthy for our democracy, but I think you're absolutely right. He's already attempting to discredit the votes of millions and millions of Americans, millions who under the best of circumstances vote by absentee — like himself, the vice president and many others — but millions more who will, of necessity, be voting by absentee because it will not be safe to go out and vote.

Because of the president's tragic handling of this pandemic, we may not have a second wave in the fall because the first wave may not have ended. But either way, whether it's the second wave or a prolonged first wave, the pandemic will be with us in the fall, and it will be very important that people can vote safely and not have to risk their health to do it.

What he is doing is so singularly destructive of our democracy and of the franchise, but it also is essentially an open invitation for foreign mischief. In the same way that the president falsely claimed in 2016 that millions of undocumented people voted in the election — if he's going to make such a huge lie about an election he won, at least in the Electoral College, you can imagine what he will do if and when he loses. And if he's able to persuade a sufficient number of Americans between now and then that they cannot rely on the results and the election is close, it could be a completely chaotic post-election period.

The Russians have a couple objects. They like to pick the candidate who best suits Russian interests, which in 2016 was Donald Trump, and in 2020 my guess will be Donald Trump again. He's been the gift that wouldn't stop giving in terms of advancing Russian objectives around the world. But their other objective is to cause Americans to question their own democracy and undermine our own democratic institutions. What better way than to amplify the president's falsehoods about absentee voting...?

In Congress, we're taking steps to try to make sure that people can safely vote..., providing funding for postage for ballots, requiring paper trails for electronic technology, providing for early voting so that polling places won't be overcrowded, taking steps to make sure that they're not disenfranchising people by closing polling stations in urban centers. [Note: Shortly before this interview, voters in Kentucky were temporarily prohibited from casting ballots because their polling place shut down with scores of people still waiting in line.] You know, that specter of people banging on the windows, trying to be let in to vote...

BP: It was horrifying...
AS: It reverberated all around the world, and it just kills me to see, in addition to everything else, how the rest of the world now views the health, or ill health, of American democracy. This will provide, tragically, fertile ground for our adversaries to stoke uncertainty about the election. Ultimately, the best remedy is making sure that every American registers to vote and turns out to vote so that this is not a close result. If it's an overwhelming result, then there's no opportunity for either the president or foreign powers to make mischief.

BP: It's hard for me to imagine, given the results last time and history since, any result this fall that ends with Donald Trump winning the popular vote. It is possible, though, to look at the map and imagine a result not so different from last time, where he loses the popular vote but squeaks out victories in a few battleground states, enough to win the Electoral College. That might put us in the realm of wondering about whether foreign interference had tipped the result. Is that something you worry about?

PHOTO BY DAVID BUTOW

AS: You cannot ignore the possibility. After all, in 2016, Donald Trump won the Electoral College by winning about 70,000 votes in a small number of states…

BP: It was incredibly close…

AS: And, you know, the social media component of the Russian campaign reached millions, hundreds of millions of people. There's no way you can definitively say that it decided or didn't decide the result.

The other thing, of course, is that their hacking and dumping operation gave the president something he could talk about, and did, over a hundred times on the campaign trail.

BP: And maybe that's worth 100,000 votes?

AS: One of the most precious things candidates have is their time, and the fact that Donald Trump spent so much of his time talking about the Russian-hacked documents indicates that he thought they could be determinative. … Could it happen again? Absolutely, it could happen again.

I have to say: I'm not just worried about foreign mischief but also domestic mischief. We see disturbing signs that domestic parties may adopt part of the Russian playbook and engage in some of the same false-flag operations that the Russians did. Indeed, in the midterm elections, there was an effort to do a test run in the Alabama primary, in which a false-flag operation could be mounted to suggest that Roy Moore would turn the state into a dry state. So I worry about domestic bad actors utilizing the same tactics that the Russians did.

I'm concerned about both domestic and foreign actors employing new technologies, like Deepfake, where you can produce completely realistic yet utterly fraudulent video or audio. If you release something like that of Joe Biden saying something he never said, and yet it being his person and his voice and indistinguishable from the real thing except in terms of computer AI [Artificial Intelligence], then you could have an election-altering event that way.

BP: And in the time it takes for the truth to catch up with that lie, a lot of votes could have been swung.

AS: Yes, we had an open hearing on Deepfake in the Intelligence Committee last year…, and I asked one of the experts about what is known as a Cheapfake, in this case a doctored video of Nancy Pelosi that showed her giving a speech at the Center for American Progress, but they doctored it by slowing it down to alter the timber of her voice and made it look like she was drunk. I asked the expert: If 10 million people saw that video, how many of the 10 million could you reasonably predict could find out that it had been doctored? And the expert's answer was: You'd be lucky if even 1 or 2 million ultimately learned that it had been doctored, and even among that 1 or 2 million … the lingering negative impression may never be able to be erased.

To give you an example, in 2016, they were trying to tell a false narrative about Hillary Clinton being in failing health. Had they used Cheapfakes of Hillary Clinton slurring her speech or other things like it, even if people were told that it was doctored, they'd still kind of wonder where they got that impression.

BP: One of the corrosive things that many people have experienced in this period is the disappearance of norms — that presidents tell the truth, that media are objective, that sacrifice is rewarded or admired. This feels like a one-way ratchet — that once you've lost a norm, it's very hard to go back and recapture it. Is there any way to get back to a certain set of expectations, or have we lost them forever? To take one example: that people in public life are expected to tell the truth and that they will suffer consequences if they are caught lying. Have we lost that as a value, or is there a way to reclaim it?

AS: I hope that we are not past that, because I have observed many times over the last three years that there is nothing more corrosive to a democracy than the idea that there is no truth, or that the truth doesn't matter anymore, or that we're entitled to our own alternate facts, or, as [Rudy] Giuliani says, "Truth isn't truth."

I think of all the destructive things that Donald Trump has done, this belongs very near the top of the list: these incessant attacks on the press being an enemy of the people, that any reporting that is critical of the administration is therefore "fake" and can't be believed, and the audacious willingness to tell known falsehoods every single day. …

I have to hope and pray that when this scourge passes, that the Republican Party reclaims its ideology and once again attaches itself to fact, even if we can disagree about what should be done with those facts.

BP: Like many people, I oscillate between wondering whether he has a kind of feral genius for division, whether he's got a gut instinct, or whether he's more calculating. I wonder if you have any insight into that.

AS: [Some time ago], the question occurred to a lot of us…: Does he just willfully lie all the time, or does he not know the difference between fact and fiction? I don't know which is more dangerous. I think maybe the answer is that throughout his life, he has come to the conclusion, based on the success of this as a strategy, that he can say whatever the hell he wants to say, and he can make it his own truth — as long as he says it with enough conviction, as long as he says it clearly enough and with enough repetition, then he can make it the fact. And I think that he feels that others who don't get that are just fools and losers.

I'll go beyond that to say — and I think this may explain some of his exasperation with the coverage that he gets in the media — I think he thinks everyone else operates by the same playbook, in the same way that people of low morals often assume that everyone else has the same lack of morals. The president believes that everyone acts the same way he does. God help us if that were true.

I do think he believes that it doesn't matter what's true or not true. What matters is what you can persuade people of. He's been very successful. He became president of the United States. He got through a lot of his business life — not very successfully, but successfully enough. It has worked for him.

BP: What needs to be done to rebuild this country and our social community in a way that feels constructive? Are there things that we should be doing as a society to get back on our feet again?

AS: There are. I guess I would start with things that we can do in government. I think we're going to need our own package of post-Watergate reforms. This is something that I've been working on for months…: things to expedite court review of congressional subpoenas, things to discourage the abuse of the pardon power, things to strengthen the independence of the Justice Department, a whole host of making [into] law norms that we thought could not be violated.

So I think there's a government reaction, which I believe will enjoy bipartisan support. Republicans won't support it now because the president would find it threatening, and he would tweet about them, and God forbid you should be on the receiving end of a negative tweet. But I think that when Trump is gone, my colleagues in the GOP will see the need to strengthen and protect our institutions against the recurrence of that kind of demagogue.

BP: Can I ask you to pause on that for a moment? I'm thinking about the aftermath of Watergate or Vietnam — the War Powers Act, for instance, as an attempt to check a president who went beyond norms — some of which resulted in really constructive change, good change in law, and some of which have felt in retrospect like overreactions to a particular president. … How do you guard against that? How do you not over-correct for this president?

AS: Well, I think we have to be careful in the reforms we propose that they don't do harm, that they don't have unintended consequences. Some things will have real constitutional limitations.

For example, how do you curb the abuse of the pardon power? This president may or may not abuse the pardon power, but in a way he has already abused it by dangling pardons …

I introduced a bill, for example, that if a president pardons someone in an investigation in which they are a witness, subject or target, then the investigative files would be provided to Congress to determine whether it was an act of obstruction. I introduced that when I was concerned about Michael Cohen. At that time, the president still hoped to keep [Cohen] within his orbit, but I knew that the president would not want the Cohen files provided to Congress, so it might deter the abuse of that power. We'll need to think about how we can do things like this, which don't deter the appropriate use of the pardon but do discourage its abuse.

Similarly, we don't want the president not to be able to influence the broad direction of the Justice Department — the prioritization of certain types of cases — but we don't want the president intervening in certain individual cases in which he's implicated.

So we'll need to be careful about how we write these things.

But, going to the broader question: What do we do as a society? I really think a lot of it will require trying to learn again how to be good consumers of information in this new world. When I was in college, I remember rushing home to my dormitory to watch Walter Cronkite's last broadcast. That was a time when there was a broad category of accepted fact, and we learned it on three networks. Of course, everybody had their opinion about what those facts should lead us to do…, but at least we believed in facts, and we knew where to find them.

Now, it's kind of a Brave New World out there. You have great, important sources of journalism and investigative journalism, and then you have whole networks or platforms, with people who are admitted into the White House press corps, and ask questions like: Is Chinese food racist? That's not the same type of journalism. That's propaganda.

I don't know whether this is a question of how we teach civics, or whether we need to start teaching courses in journalism, not for people who want to become journalists but for people who want to consume good information. We're going to need to learn again how to discern reliable sources of information and fact from fiction.

I think it's going to be not only important that we have national leadership in the Oval Office but also that we have local leadership at every level. We need a return to basic decency. We need to remember who we are as a people — a fundamentally good, kind, generous people. We have to remember what the country stands for in terms of our ideals, our democratic ideals.

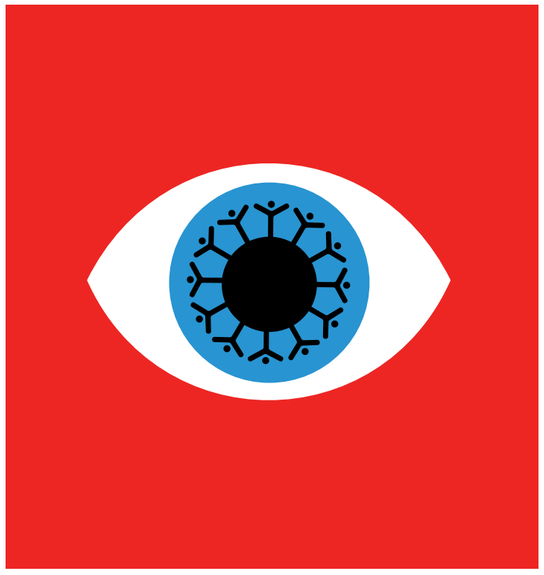
Of all the things in the Bolton book [former National Security Adviser John Bolton's memoir, *The Room Where It Happened*] that I found disturbing, and there was a lot for me to find disturbing…

BP: I'll bet there was…

AS: … was the acknowledgement that in private conversations with Chinese President Xi, Donald Trump was not only telling him that it was appropriate to put a million or more Chinese citizens, Uighurs, in concentration camps, but that it was the right thing to do. It's hard to imagine a more fundamental betrayal of everything our country stands for.

We need to remind the rest of the world what America stands for. More importantly, we need to remind ourselves what we stand for.

CLOSING NOTE:
HOPE IN THE RUINS



WE BEGAN THIS ISSUE WITH A QUESTION: How have America's cascading crises of 2020 changed the fundamentals of life in this country? We end this issue with some answers, none of them easy and not all cheery.

The short answer is that these crises — fighting off a pandemic, reeling from economic collapse, grappling with racism — have left many people less secure — in their health, their well-being and the assurance of their convictions. But these crises also have opened up possibilities to learn. Sometimes a little insecurity is what's needed to move forward.

In some areas, the combination of the pandemic and Washington's tragic response to it has produced misery. UCLA researchers immersed in Los Angeles' foster care system have observed with alarm the vulnerability of children in this crisis, and have helped sound the alarm that a decline in reported abuse is not a sign of health, but rather a cause for worry, not of violence decreasing but of it going unnoticed. Meanwhile, the work of Professor Ananya Roy has illustrated the precariousness of housing in Los Angeles, and the virus and economic slowdown have only compounded that problem.

When it comes to crime and policing, the picture is more muddled. Jorja Leap and other UCLA researchers are working with the LAPD to develop thoughtful models of policing that protect, built on the Community Safety Partnership at two of the city's housing projects. Other academics, at UCLA and elsewhere, are raising deep questions about whether American policing is beyond the reach of reform. Former LAPD Chief Bernard C. Parks, profiled in this issue, is skeptical of "defunding" police, and even some proponents worry that politics may not favor it right now. But the unsettledness of this moment has given rise to big thinking. Not all of of it will result in change, but it's good to think anew, and, if nothing else, many are doing just that.

And speaking of this moment, politics is now squarely upon the American people. As writers Molly Selvin and Bill Boyarsky document in their articles on the politics of now, this election has been different than any before it. Familiar themes abound — one side argues for safety, the other for stewardship and decency — but this campaign has tested time-honored assumptions of politics. The League of Women Voters once was beyond the fray; no more. Mail-in ballots and easing voting restrictions were presumed to be essential for democracy; not for everyone, it turns out, at least not in this cycle.

As the articles in this issue make clear, some of these problems are complicated and the solutions are counterintuitive. And yet, some are achingly simple. Faced with a virus, we need to wash our hands, keep apart from one another and wear masks. Confronted with economic ruin, we rely on the government to help those who need it most. And faced with political division over race and so many other aspects of our lives, we have the oldest of American remedies: We can vote. Please do.

— Jim Newton

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Special thanks to Lisa Horowitz, the chief copy editor for Blueprint, whose sharp eye makes this magazine what it is. ***– Jim Newton***

A NOTE ON STYLE

With this issue, Blueprint has adopted several style changes to acknowledge evolving standards of identification. We now use Latina/o to identify those of Hispanic descent, though individual subjects and sources may opt for Latino or Latina. We capitalize Black and White to refer to people of those ethnicities. We considered capitalizing Black but not White, as some publications have, but were persuaded by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, which, among others, argues that failing to "name 'White' as a race ... frames Whiteness as both neutral and the standard."

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Blueprint's mission — to stimulate conversation about problems confronting Los Angeles and the rest of California — doesn't stop on publication day. We urge you to continue these conversations by contacting us or our contributors or by reaching out directly to the researchers whose work is featured here. We also hope you'll follow us on the web, where we showcase exclusives and link to ongoing debates in these fields. You can find us online at **blueprint.ucla.edu**

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BLUEPRINT

NATION DOWN: THE YEAR OF AMERICAN CRISES

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