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Surprise, Shock, and Global Crisis: Reflections on International History during the 2020 Pandemic

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I'm writing in late April 2020 during a nation-wide shutdown in response to the public health threat of the COVID-19 virus. Travel has ceased; shops are closed; universities are quiet and empty. Three million people around the world have tested positive for this highly contagious and deadly virus. In less than three months, it has killed over 200,000 people, 56,000 in the United States alone. And these numbers climb daily. The real impact of the pandemic upon human life will not be known for many months and years. The impact upon the global economy has already been catastrophic. In the United States alone, the unemployment rate has hit 20%—a figure we have not seen since the 1930s. Economic activity around the world has sharply contracted, and massive stimulus efforts by the U.S. federal government have not adequately buoyed the economy. The crisis has struck quickly, unexpectedly, and savagely; we are all unsettled and anxious, facing the unknown.

In such a context of trauma and global fracture, I worried it was self-indulgent to write about my career as a historian. Let's face it, historians aren't much use right now. No one is calling us to manufacture personal protective equipment for health care workers, or to develop vaccines, or even to figure out how far droplets of virus-laden phlegm travel in a crowded supermarket. We are not, to use the vocabulary of the crisis, 'essential personnel.'

On the other hand, it won't be long before our particular talents will be called upon to do the work we are trained to do: to place moments of crisis and rupture into a broader context. We are no strangers to surprise, after all: the end of the Cold War, the attacks of 9/11, and the election of Donald Trump as president, all came unexpectedly and shook the foundations of the global order. The COVID-19 crisis might yet exceed them all in consequence. As the world assesses the aftershocks, international historians can help. We can unpack the global politics of the crisis, and shed light on how leaders, global institutions, and alliances have worked or failed. We can illuminate the origins and structure of globalization and the networks that conveyed the virus to every corner of the world. We can draw linkages between the threats to public health and the threats to democracy now looming around the world. And because we are humanists, we may also be of use in evaluating the emotional and cognitive response of our species to hitherto unimagined catastrophe.¹

In keeping with the spirit of this wonderful series on the "Scholar's Craft," I'll offer my own story of how I came to study international history. For me, it had to do with my family. My father, an extroverted Ivy Leaguer, joined the U.S. foreign service in 1957 and was immediately packed off to a consulate in Hue, Vietnam, in the interregnum between the First Indochina War and the Second. My older brother was born there, in a convent hospital; French nuns comforted my mother

¹ Luke McGee, "Power-hungry leaders are itching to exploit the coronavirus crisis," *CNN.com*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/01/europe/coronavirus-and-the-threat-to-democracy-intl/index.html>

with small glasses of wine as she convalesced. My father had signed up with a new branch of the State Department—the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), a product of the Age of Eisenhower that has been so well analyzed by Ken Osgood in his excellent book.² Scholars nowadays breezily describe the work of USIA as “state-sponsored propaganda.”³ I suppose that’s accurate, but I have trouble squaring that somewhat sinister phrasing with old family photos of my idealistic young father, smiling broadly in his white linen and creased shorts, handing out brochures about “the American way of life” to Vietnamese rice farmers.

In those days, the State Department invested in its people. My father was sent to Tokyo in 1960—a mere 15 years after the Second World War—to take full-time immersive Japanese language courses, and then on to another consulate, in this case, in Fukuoka, Japan where I was born in 1965. Dad became a ‘Japan hand’ and for the next two decades, tacking back and forth from our home in Washington, D.C. to assignments in Tokyo, he worked tirelessly to cultivate trans-Pacific learning, educational exchange, and cultural engagement between these two countries. My brother, two sisters, and I studied Japanese, traveled the country, took public transport, unsupervised, all over Tokyo, and developed a taste for *manga* and sushi long before they had become ubiquitous in the States.

Years later, I would return to those childhood scenes through the work of many excellent international historians. Seth Jacobs, Edward Miller, Jessica Chapman, and Fred Logevall have helped me see the larger picture of U.S.-Vietnam relations in the 1950s and 60s, while Naoko Shibusawa, John Dower, and Drew McKevitt have shed light on the making of U.S.-Japan cultural relations.⁴

In 1977, after a longish run in Washington, my father was sent to Tel Aviv, Israel. It was a plum assignment for Dad – this was the era of the Camp David Accords, a fleeting time of optimism in Arab-Israeli relations. And it was a magical time for me. I gladly exchanged my dull junior high school in suburban Chevy Chase, Maryland for a stint at the American School in Herzliya, where I studied Hebrew and grew my hair to Peter Frampton-like proportions. I spent a lot of time on the beaches of Tel Aviv; weekends could feature skiing on Mt. Hermon in the Golan Heights, clambering across the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, or snorkeling in the Red Sea.

Israel was then an easy place for a young American to love. To me, it seemed like a vibrant democratic nation full of smart, multi-lingual people entwined in a historic and tragic diaspora. My school’s French teacher had a dark blue tattoo on her forearm. That was my personal introduction to a topic I had never learned about in middle school: the Holocaust. Regular family outings to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem filled out my education quickly. But, living inside the American colony in Tel Aviv, I saw little of the Palestinian life and history that Israel’s success had effaced and suppressed.⁵

² Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

³ Nicholas Cull, “‘The Man Who Invented Truth’: The Tenure of Edward R. Murrow as Director of the United States Information Agency During the Kennedy Years.” *Cold War History* 4:1 (October 2003): 23-48.

⁴ Seth Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Jessica M. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012). Naoko Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Andrew C. McKevitt, *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

⁵ I have learned much about those years from scholars like Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States,*

By the time I arrived at Kenyon College in 1982, I had crossed a lot of borders. I was lucky to have seen the United States from the outside, catching a glimpse of how some people in Asia, the Middle East and Europe saw the American behemoth. More than that, I came to think of history as the only way to understand the world. I majored in History and French literature, fortunate to study at an institution that let me dabble in the liberal arts. An unforgettable semester in Yugoslavia, Holland, and London ended at the Public Record Office at Kew, where I researched my senior honors thesis amidst the weird angst of Thatcher's Britain. I left college with some sense that I should become a journalist, though I did not have the work ethic and drive for that career. I spent a year at the *Washington Post* as a copy aide, literally filling Bob Woodward's stapler, answering phones, delivering mail. I was bored and I missed school. I applied to Yale for graduate study and, to my astonishment, got in.

New Haven in the 1980s was a shabby, struggling city, and Yale itself seemed cold and intimidating to me. Ph.D. students, unlike the precious undergrads, were outsiders, literally kept on the wrong side of gated college walls, excluded from clubs, dorms or dining halls. The Hall of Graduate Studies (HGS), a subfusc, cobwebbed neo-gothic pile, housed the History Department. Along corridors clad in gray-green tile, empty faculty offices and dark mailboxes stretched away into the gloom. HGS was one of the ugliest places I had ever seen.

Yet it did not take long to realize how lucky I was. Among sparkling, talented classmates, I soon found myself at seminar tables learning about Freud with Peter Gay; the British Empire with Linda Colley and Robin Winks; German history with Henry Turner; Poland and Eastern Europe with Piotr Wandycz; China with Jonathan Spence; U.S. foreign relations with Gaddis Smith; and the historiography of war with Sir Michael Howard. And then there were U.S. historians like David Davis, Nancy Cott, David Montgomery, John Demos.... It was a historian's version of one of Roald Dahl's 'sweet shops'—a place that fizzed with tempting intellectual delights at every turn. One abiding lesson I learned: try everything. Graduate school ought to be a time to broaden horizons, not narrow them.

I arrived at Yale without a clear focus; but after my first week in Paul Kennedy's seminar on strategy and diplomacy, I was hooked. Paul was then the 43-year-old author of a giant national bestseller, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, which had just been published.⁶ His seminar, held in a book-draped study on Underhill Road in Hamden, blew me away. Gentle, lightly humorous, wry, Paul would sit in the corner of the room in a wingback chair, the students arrayed before him on wobbly chairs and stools. The first day in class, he passed around a 30-page reading list and suggested that we might want to read it all. It was just a suggestion, but it was clear that in order to keep up, you could not just read one book a week. We began with Lenin, Hobson, and the old literature on 'late' imperialism. Then it was on to the origins of the First World War, reading work that emphasized first the military-strategic angle, then the socio-cultural dimension, then the domestic political story, always with an eye to the question of perception and misperception among the great powers. From there we dove into the war itself, then the peace settlements, appeasement, Adolf Hitler, and war again. I was spellbound.

Immensely learned, always inviting, and joyful in his teaching and scholarship, Paul gave us a methodology for studying world affairs. It was not rigorous or didactic, and certainly not ideological. Rather, his work demonstrated that the nation-state was much less important in explaining the evolution of the modern world than the interactions *between* states—the conflicts and frictions, but also transmissions of people, ideas, finance, governance, and instruments of power. To see the

the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Peter Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005); and an insightful study of culture and perception, Amy Kaplan, *Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

⁶ Paul M. Kennedy, *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

modern world as a complex system, one had to find the threads that connected its components. That meant teasing out separate lines of inquiry—politics, diplomacy, war, economics, ideology, nationalism—before tying them together in a compelling explanation. And although many of his Ph.D. students would start their careers by working on smaller canvases, we were inspired by Paul to reflect on how our portraits fit into the vast picture gallery of the modern world.

And then, just as I was getting my footing in grad school, a shock to system threw us all off balance: in November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War, a geopolitical and ideological struggle that seemed eternal and unchanging, simply evaporated. A giant global rupture occurred on our watch. How did international historians respond?

Very well, as it happened. With the end of the Cold War, a golden age of international history dawned. A field that had been summarily dismissed in the 1970s and 1980s as hopelessly old-fashioned found new urgency and dynamism. Why had the Cold War ended? What was its legacy? What kind of ‘order’ now loomed? As eastern European, Russian, and even Chinese archives started to open in the early 1990s, battalions of young historians trekked off to search for documentary treasures, and a new history of the Cold War developed with astonishing speed. Foundations like MacArthur, Bradley, Olin, and Smith Richardson poured money into Cold War history, seeing in this work a way of linking historical knowledge to the policymaking. The post-World War II settlement, the Marshal Plan, the origins of NATO, the division of Europe, the Soviet conquest of Eastern Europe, inner-Soviet bloc rifts—all this seemed immediately relevant as world leaders in the early 1990s were hammering out a new post-Cold War order. Energetic scholars like James Hershberg, Mark Kramer, Christian Ostermann, Vladislav Zubok and many others helped launch the Cold War International Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC, which edited and published troves of fresh evidence extracted from behind the Iron Curtain.

I chose to work on France, a nation’s whose role in the Cold War had been poorly studied and usually discounted by Anglo-American scholars. I felt there was a gap to fill: how had postwar France, despite internal instability and economic weakness, managed to shape Europe’s recovery so significantly? That was the animating question of my first book and it was inspired by what I’d learned from Paul: everything is connected. I found that French domestic politics, economic and colonial policy, strategy and diplomacy were all closely tied together. I became a Cold War historian by working from the outside in—not examining America’s policy toward France, but France’s strategy for navigating among bigger powers and positioning itself as the keystone of the new Europe.⁷

As I was scribbling away on my doctoral thesis, Kennedy, sensing an opportunity in this moment of global disruption, founded a small center, International Security Studies (ISS), that was dedicated to bringing historical thinking to bear on contemporary policy. Although not a Cold War historian himself, Paul was a gifted convener of talent: he gathered historians, political scientists, policymakers, business leaders and non-governmental officials, and engaged them in conversation across disciplines. ISS organized countless seminars, issued white papers, funded pre-doctoral and post-doctoral scholarships, all in the service of developing a new international history that could speak to the contemporary world. Long before others used the term ‘applied history,’ Paul linked the academy to the world of decision-making in ways that profited both. He invited me to help him run ISS, and that meant six more fulfilling years of working and teaching at Yale.⁸

The end of the Cold War, the unification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the rapid process of European integration all made Europe a hot topic, and I taught a new class at Yale on “Europe since 1945” which, to my surprise, brought in hundreds of students. It was a trial by fire, but after three years of lecturing, I felt I had nailed down a clear narrative about Europe’s passage from World War II to the introduction of the euro, and it proved to be fairly easy to write

⁷ William I Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁸ A conference celebrating “Three Decades of ISS” was held at Yale in 2017, and a report can be found here: <https://iss.yale.edu/news/three-decades-iss>

this up as a book: *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945-2000*.⁹ It was, I confess, a Whiggish account of progress from violence and genocide toward democracy and transparency. Looking back on that book now in light of the return of authoritarian rule in Hungary, Russia, Turkey and the Balkans, the normalization of Europe's far-right, and the racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia that stalks the continent, I see I underestimated the grip of Europe's dark past on its present. Yet the book reflects an optimistic time and a sense of immense promise following the peaceful end of the Cold War.

The Yale history department, buttressed by ISS, was a glorious place to spend the 1990s if you were a student of world affairs. I learned so much from my classmates and friends like Matt Connelly, Mary Sarotte, Jennifer Siegel, David Herrmann, Jeremi Suri, Erez Manela, Will Inboden, Ted Bromund, David Stone, David Schimmelpenninck, Reynolds Salerno, Talbot Imlay, Lucy Chester, Richard Drayton, Mark Lawrence, Kristin Hoganson, Geoff Wawro, Tami Biddle, Fred Logevall, Tim Naftali, Bill Wohlforth, Will Gray and Pertti Ahonen: a dream cohort of fun and talented people.

And to top it off, the country's most influential Cold War historian, John Lewis Gaddis, came to Yale in the early '90s. John's masterful and provocative synthesis of the new Cold War history, *We Now Know*, summed up the progress of a decade of new research.¹⁰ It was a landmark book but, because it only covered the first two decades of the conflict, it also showed how much more work was yet to be done. The most significant recent scholarship has moved past the 'classic' phase of the Cold War and has been especially strong on the 'global' struggle in Africa and Asia, the economic disruptions of the 1970s, the Reagan years, and the end of the Cold War. The field has produced superb work and shows no sign of slowing.¹¹

In 2004, after a stint at Wellesley College, my career was dramatically changed by a force of nature named Richard Immerman. Then serving as Chair of the Temple History Department and running the prestigious Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy, Richard had made his name as a leading scholar of intelligence and national security. Tireless, dedicated to the profession with a zeal few have matched, Richard had built Temple's History Department into one of the country's best programs for the study of diplomacy and strategy. When Temple's leadership gave Richard license to hire new faculty to fill out many holes that had opened up over the years, he hired my brilliant wife, Elizabeth Varon, a historian of nineteenth century U.S. history, and arranged a spousal appointment for me. Under Richard's inspired leadership, with wonderful colleagues such as Petra Goedde, Beth Bailey and Vlad Zubok, the Temple History department became a dynamic center of activity for students of war, diplomacy, culture, and the Cold War.

⁹ Hitchcock, *The Struggle For Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945-2002* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002).

¹⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹¹ Though the recent scholarship on the post-1970 Cold War is voluminous, a few books that I have found especially powerful are Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Daniel Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Paul Chamberlin, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York: Harper, 2018); Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); James Graham Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); and one of the best interpretations we have on key decision points in the Cold War, Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, The Soviet Union, and The Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007). Michael De Groot, my former Ph.D. student at Virginia, will soon publish "Disruption: Economic Globalization and the End of the Cold War" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2018), which draws on archival collections in eight countries and five languages.

Once again, a global crisis shaped my scholarly direction. The decision of the George W. Bush administration to invade Iraq in 2003 had a profound effect on all of us working in international history. We now know, twenty years on, that the Iraq war marks a crucial stage in America's terminal decline: the position of moral strength and global leadership the United States occupied after the Cold War disappeared, poured out like water from a canteen onto hot sand. I personally felt a degree of rage and impotent fury that I had never known before, perhaps because as a scholar of strategy, I felt it was so obvious that invading Iraq was a bad national security decision—to say nothing of its immoral and illegal character. When news leaked out that U.S. soldiers, freshly arrived as liberators, had mistreated detainees at a prison near Baghdad called Abu Ghraib, the world looked on in horror. And it got worse when, in the name of national security, American officials deliberately crafted a wide-ranging program of torture to extract information from captives in the 'war on terror.'

Those shameful events led me into the history of human rights and the laws of war. With Petra Goedde and Akira Iriye, I edited a collection of essays, *The Human Rights Revolution*, that gained a wide audience because of its timely content. But at the same time, I toiled away on a more ambitious book called *The Bitter Road to Freedom: The Human Cost of Allied Victory in World War II Europe*, which had nothing and everything to do with Iraq.¹²

My purpose in that book was to illuminate the experience of European civilians who were liberated from German tyranny between D-Day and V-E Day (June 6, 1944-May 8, 1945). I wanted to remind readers of the terrible price that liberated people pay in wartime. The French civilians in Normandy on D-Day, the Belgians of the Ardennes, the starving Dutch in Amsterdam, even the Germans in their pulverized cities and the surviving Jews of Hitler's death camps—all suffered in their passage from captivity to freedom. The subject seemed especially poignant because on the eve of the war in Iraq, American officials boasted of the 'cake-walk' that awaited them and predicted a short war of liberation followed by instant reconciliation between invader and invaded. Instead, what followed was a strategic and humanitarian catastrophe. All wars, just or unjust, take a terrible harvest of human life, and it seemed important to counter American hubris with a fresh and honest account of what war really does to the people who must endure it.

One person who never lost sight of the human toll of war was, notably, the principal architect of the liberation of western Europe, Dwight Eisenhower. In working on *The Bitter Road*, I had come to admire Eisenhower's wartime leadership, his generous character and his human qualities. Once I had finished my (quite depressing) book on the liberation of Europe, I decided to turn to Eisenhower and in particular, his presidency. Although the national security policies of the Eisenhower years had been carefully anatomized by numerous scholars, perhaps most expertly by Immerman, I was interested in trying my hand at presidential biography and especially in exploring a particular species that has all but disappeared today: the moderate Republican.¹³

After moving to the University of Virginia in 2010 to join another great team of international historians led by Melvyn Leffler and Philip Zelikow, I set out on *The Age of Eisenhower: America and the World in the 1950s*. Popular memory sees the 1950s as a placid, care-free time, but the decade I encountered was marred by McCarthyism and the Red Scare, covert operations against left-wing governments, a rapidly expanding warfare state, and a restive Civil Rights movement. It was tempting to adopt the tone of hectoring condescension that characterized much scholarly writing about Eisenhower's leadership; but perhaps because I finished the book in the aftermath of yet another unforeseen shock, the election of President Donald Trump in 2016, I grew empathetic toward Eisenhower. He was not a transformative president, and his policy choices were limited and often ill-conceived, as I documented extensively in the book. But he was a life-long public servant, a figure of decency and moderation whose consensus-building style, belief in internationalism and alliance

¹² Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, and Hitchcock, eds., *The Human Rights Revolution: An International History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: The Human Cost of Allied Victory in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 2008).

¹³ Robert R. Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

diplomacy, respect for science and expertise, and personal dignity marked him out from so many leaders of our own troubled time.¹⁴

Today, I am once again wrapped up in a scholarly project that reflects my reaction to a sudden and ugly crisis. In August 2017, torch-carrying and gun-toting white supremacists staged a violent riot in Charlottesville. They soiled the grounds of the University of Virginia, menaced the city's central synagogue, and shouted hate-filled slogans in the leafy public parks just blocks from my home. Rioters hoisted the Nazi swastika alongside the Confederate battle flag. These events, and the death and trauma they inflicted, still hurt, and have occasioned insightful scholarship by my Virginia colleagues.¹⁵ Most observers rightly cast the riots as embedded in a longer history of slavery, the Civil War, and contested memory. I read them through a different lens, as part of that long tradition of American antipathy to globalism and liberal democracy that went back to the 1930s. In that time, too, capitalism had seized up, xenophobia and nationalism spiked, cries of "America First" rallied millions. Can the history of the 1930s shed light on America's place in the world today? Check back in a few years and I might have an answer.

Surprise, shock, and global crisis: hard as such moments are to experience, they have a way of jolting us to ask new questions. We are passing through another such moment now, a global pandemic of still-unknown scale and scope, and we'll soon be called on to make sense of it. As a recent survey of the field has shown, international history is more robust and innovative now than it has been in a generation, and it will rise to the challenge.¹⁶ In doing so, historians can draw inspiration from a rich literature on topics as varied as crisis leadership, pandemics and global health, global economic rupture, and on past efforts to rebuild world orders following moments of breakdown, as in 1918, 1945 and 1989.¹⁷

But we'll also have to look critically at the structures of power that got the U.S. into this fix. This globe-circling virus has found the United States at a low ebb morally, politically, institutionally. How did the United States get here? Did the enduring myth of 'American exceptionalism' blind elites to the threat of a global virus that recognizes no national claim to supremacy? Or should we look for an explanation of the United States' predicament to the structures of neoliberal capitalism that gutted domestic industries, deregulated world finance, and left the United States dependent on global supply chains that became the vectors of the virus itself? Perhaps the cause of the problem is the hollowed-out American health system, which has been collapsing in slow motion for years and which, despite the heroic sacrifice of health-care workers, has

¹⁴ Hitchcock, *The Age of Eisenhower: America and the World in the 1950s* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

¹⁵ Claudrena N. Harold and Louis P. Nelson, eds., *Charlottesville 2017: The Legacy of Race and Inequity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018).

¹⁶ Erez Manela, "International Society as a Historical Subject," *Diplomatic History* 44:2 (2020), 184-209.

¹⁷ As examples, Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 1999); John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (New York: Penguin, 2004); Christian W. McMillen, *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Eric Rauchway, *The Money Makers: How Roosevelt and Keynes Ended the Depression, Defeated Fascism, and Secured a Prosperous Peace* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); Hitchcock and Paul Kennedy, eds., *From War to Peace: Altered Strategic Landscapes in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

been unable to meet the overwhelming crisis. And what do we learn about race and class in contemporary America from data that tell us that African Americans are over-represented among the many victims of the virus?¹⁸

These are just a few of the questions we must address if we are to write meaningful history about the 2020 pandemic. Before we begin, though, it may be best to think about the crisis in its human dimension, and cultivate a sense of empathy toward the millions, at home and abroad, who are enduring suffering, loss and hardship. That too is an essential part of the scholar's craft.

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¹⁸ "Provisional Death Counts for Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): Data Updates by Select Demographic and Geographic Characteristics," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid_weekly/