



THE NETWORK FOR
SOCIAL WORK MANAGEMENT



THE PROCESS OF FORESIGHT: HOW FUTURES PRACTICE CAN ENHANCE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

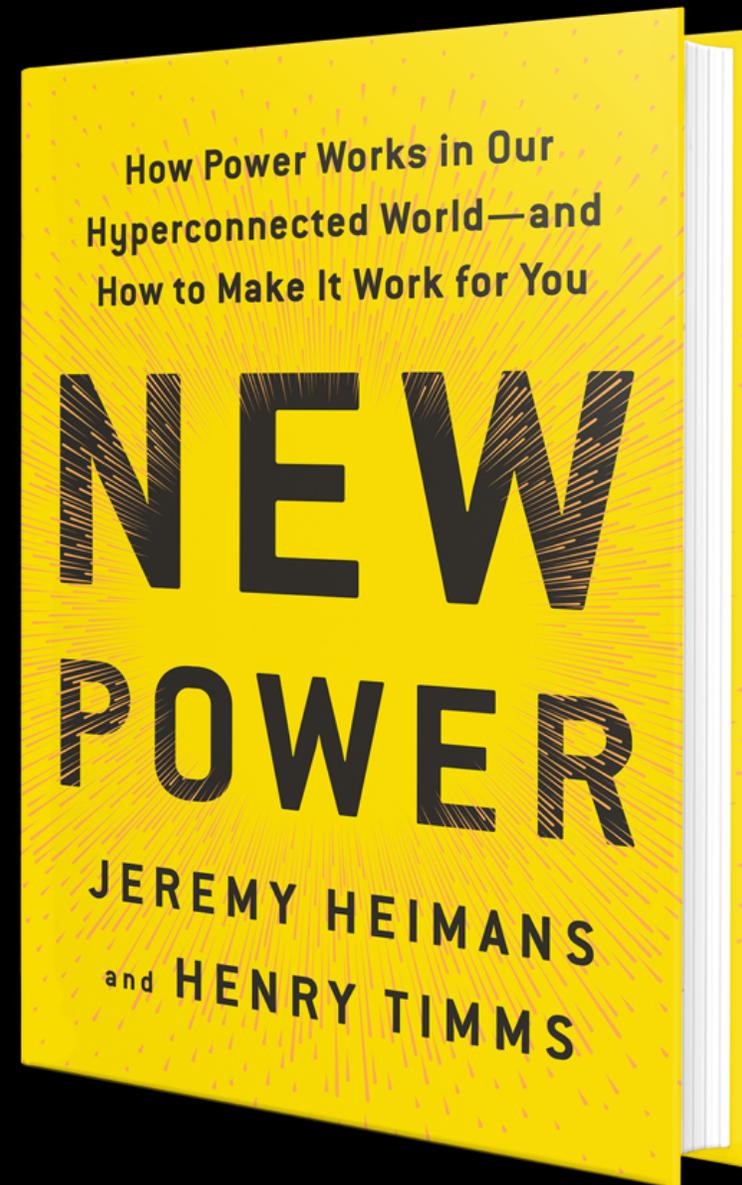
Laura Nissen, Ph.D., LMSW, CADCI
Professor, Presidential Futures Fellow
Portland State University
Research Fellow, Institute for the Future

“The liberated futures we want don’t exist as untouchable distant points out of our reach. When we focus on collective action, mutual aid, self-determination, centering and the leadership of the marginalized, we defy linear time. We pull those futures into the present. Let’s keep pulling liberated futures into the present over and over again, until that’s all there is.” Afrofuturist, author and activist – Walidah Imarisha



FOLLOW UP #1

- Future of power:
- Hierarchies vs. networks



FOLLOW UP #2 – SOCIAL WORK ETHICS AND THE FUTURE

- Lots of follow up questions about “does NASW need to revise the code of ethics based on all these futures ideas?”
- The answer (underscored) is that all professions and codes of ethics are being “stress tested” right now due to rapidly changing conditions and ecosystemic pressures.
- Of course social work is among them.
- Reached out to Dr. Mit Joyner (incoming President of NASW) about this and she provided me an extensive response about how the code is revised and how to get involved. I’ve put a blog post together about this and you can find it at www.socialworkfutures.com
- Get involved!!

WEBINAR #2 – A 3-PART SERIES



- Last session – “What is futures thinking? Why important in post-normal times?”
- This session – How does futures practice “work?” What do futurists do? What does good foresight practice look like – and how does it all relate to what we do as social workers?
- Next session – Creating deeper possibility spaces for social work and futures practice. What if social workers were futurists?

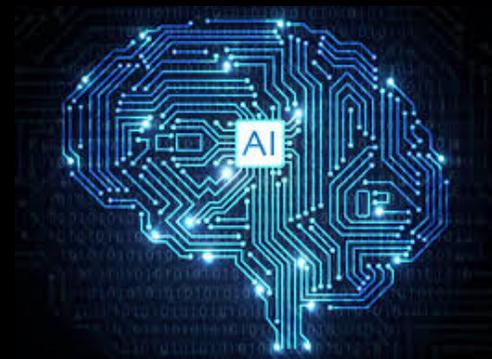
FUTURES THINKING IS:

- About deepening and strengthening the ability to “anticipate” and imagine in new ways.
- Commit to reducing “short-term-ism” in our immediate and extended circles of influence. How can futures thinking help us make better decisions? (Deeper commitment to exploring “unintended consequences” and “underdeveloped possibilities)
- Resisting powerful actors who “dictate” what the future is going to be in favor of increasing agency and democracy in co-constructing desired futures while protecting/resisting undesired futures.
- Not neutral – it is powerful. Who gets to wield that power? Is it democratic?

WHAT FUTURES THINKING HAS TO OFFER RIGHT NOW

- Connect the past, present and the future
- Learn from the past, make sense of the present as we deal with it and connect both of these to an arc of meaning and the choices we have about what happens next.
- “Unlearn” our way of thinking about what is and isn’t possible. The veil between these things is especially porous right now.
- Critical, post-modern, anti-racist, anti-colonial, cultural, interpretive, participative, holistic
- Bow to Indigenous lens

WORK TO DO – CAN A FUTURES LENS OFFER NEW POSSIBILITIES?



SO WHAT IS FUTURES PRACTICE?

- What is it?
- Who does it?
- What is the “outcome” of good foresight/futures practice?
- Building a learning and practice community
- Elements and process
- Example from my own social work practice history – in motion
- Covid-19 signals and implications
- Transition thoughts to our final webinar



WHAT IS FUTURES PRACTICE?

- Something individuals do (in networks with other futurists)
- Something groups or collectives do (in teams)
- Something organizations do (Red Cross, AARP, World Bank, Facebook, Federal Foresight Network in the U.S.)
- Something countries do (or groups of countries): Scotland, Finland, European Futures Network, United Nations

Apply theories, ethics, practices and disciplined study of the social science informed elements of futures knowledge and action to increase “foresightfulness” and make better, more thoughtful decisions together.

Deepen readiness, anticipation, agency, agility, intelligence and imagination to the problems of today to increase possibilities for a better future.

WHO DOES IT?

- Futurists – foresight practitioners
- Many different traditions, many types of work and settings
- Get training, certification and even degrees in foresight (My affiliation and training started with Institute for the Future – but there are numerous groups that do good training across the field. Information can be found on my blog.). Note: Many of the things in this 3-part webinar are included in foresight training, but in more depth. Yes it would be awesome to have a social work specific foresight training and I'm working on it!!
- Emerging credentialing system – optional at this point.
- Most futures practitioners focus on a specific area and build a practice specific to the needs of the sector they are focused on.
- Work as consultants, writers, trainers, teachers, facilitators and community builders.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD FUTURIST

- I am open to new ideas, including what others might call weird and whacky.
- I am curious – I want to know why it is so. I'm a good observer.
- I think outside the box – I understand my field of practice but I'm interested in global change as well.
- I challenge assumptions about the future – mine and others.
- I value diversity and multiple points of view.
- I am resilient. I understand the value of foresight to better understand the future, and that this future may be sometimes difficult to communicate.
- I trust and value my expertise and knowledge to be able to identify observations relevant and important to my organizations future (p. 31). – Maree Conway, 2015

ROLES OF A FUTURIST

- Futures midwife – helping new ideas be born and help new parents understand how to navigate what is happening.
- Storytelling coach – using the power of storytelling to open new possibilities.
- Window cleaner – helping people think outside the box and see beyond their usual constraints.
- Map maker – enabling a bigger picture to be seen with new perspectives.
- Psychoanalyst – help move through the anxiety of the unknown and help to create positive thinking, cultivating empathy, and deep reflection on peoples' roles in understanding and setting paths forward through change.
- Learning facilitator – engaging user-learners as reflective practitioners (p. 5).

Wilkinson, 2017

(I would add we are a "flare thrower" and change agent when we see human rights, equity, justice and well-being issues in the "way" a particular future is being conceptualized or playing out.)

INDICATORS OF FORESIGHT DONE WELL- PART TWO



- Provide anticipatory intelligence to system actors.
- Collective learning leading to informed action.
- Support decision making.
- Develop new ways of thinking.
- Support democratized use of the methods.
- Better manage external pressures and challenges. (European Foresight Monitoring Network)

BUILDING A FORESIGHT PRACTICE COMMUNITY



- Generally this isn't something people do alone.
- That said – most folks who do this are constantly learning, exploring and sharing on their own.
- Foresight is a global community.
- Explore, sample, learn – and jump in where you most align.
- Social work will be evolving in this way.
- Opportunities will be forthcoming from the Social Work Health Futures Lab and other places.

THE PROCESS OF FORESIGHT - STAGES

- Preparation – getting ready, gathering, scoping, defining, collaborating, engaging and empowering
- Inputs – what is happening out there related to the issue of interest?
- Analytics – what patterns are emerging and what might they imply?
- Interpreting – how do we get to deeper levels of imagining what might be happening and what that means about how to best effect the future?
- Anticipatory action – how do we prepare for what might come next based on everything we've learned?
- Action and renewal – how do we build a new kind of plan that invites us (and requires) ongoing adjustments, flexes to new realities (both opportunities and challenges), and incorporates the almost certainty that the future will surprise us.

PREPARATION

- Getting clear as you can about why foresight is the right approach.
- Determining who is an “essential voice” to start a foresight process (as social workers we can be great at this part)
- Building trust and addressing barriers to collective success before starting work together
- Cultivating an environment where risk taking and a new way of doing something together is embraced

INPUTS – WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD



Signals
Practice

- Signs that the world is changing – but not as strong as a trend. Signals are what is “after” the trend.
- Get your attention but you have to be looking.
- The arts, the streets, youth movements, any place where people are creating and adapting creatively to the emerging world.
- Beyond the dominant powers that be.
- Gather them, share them, debate them, arrange them, reveal patterns in them, etc.

THE ROLE OF HISTORY – LOOK BACK TO LOOK AHEAD

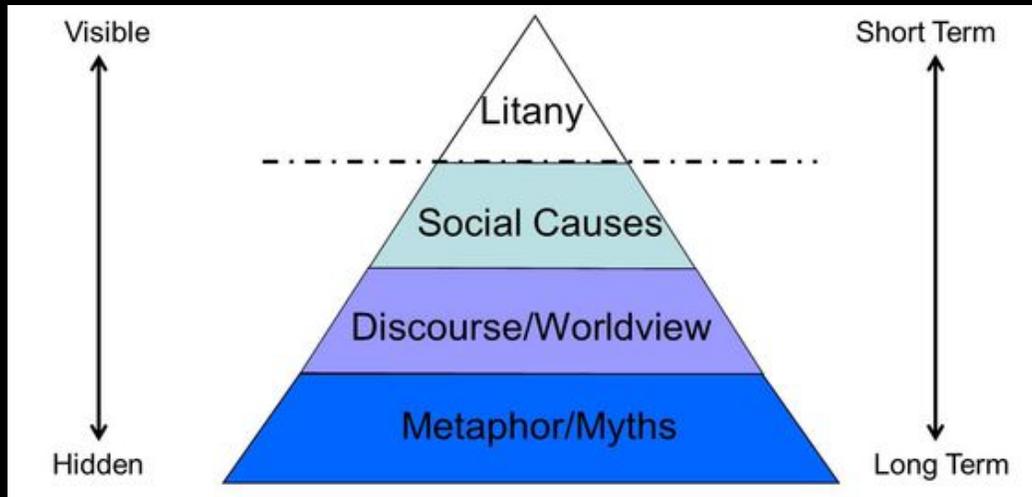
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The actions taken by governments and policymakers in response to COVID-19 aim to **learn the lessons of history** and minimise the devastation caused by pandemics.

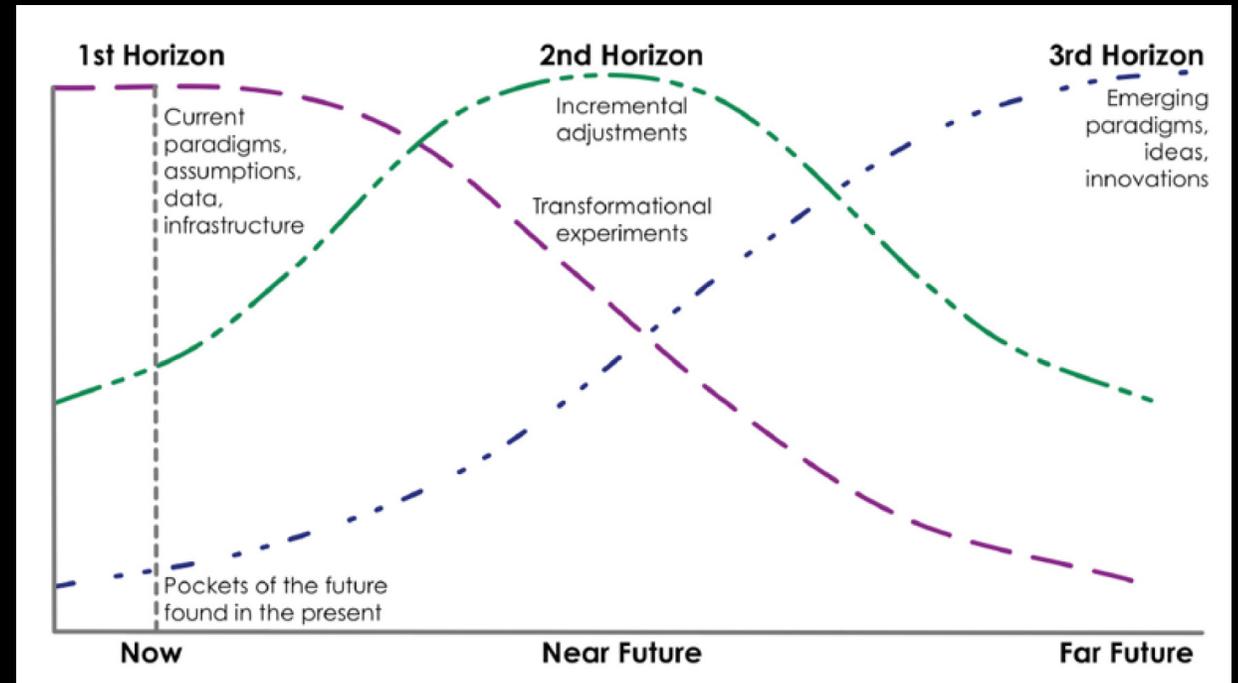
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INTERPRETING – GOING DEEPER



Causal Layered Analysis, Inayatullah



Three Horizons, Sharpe



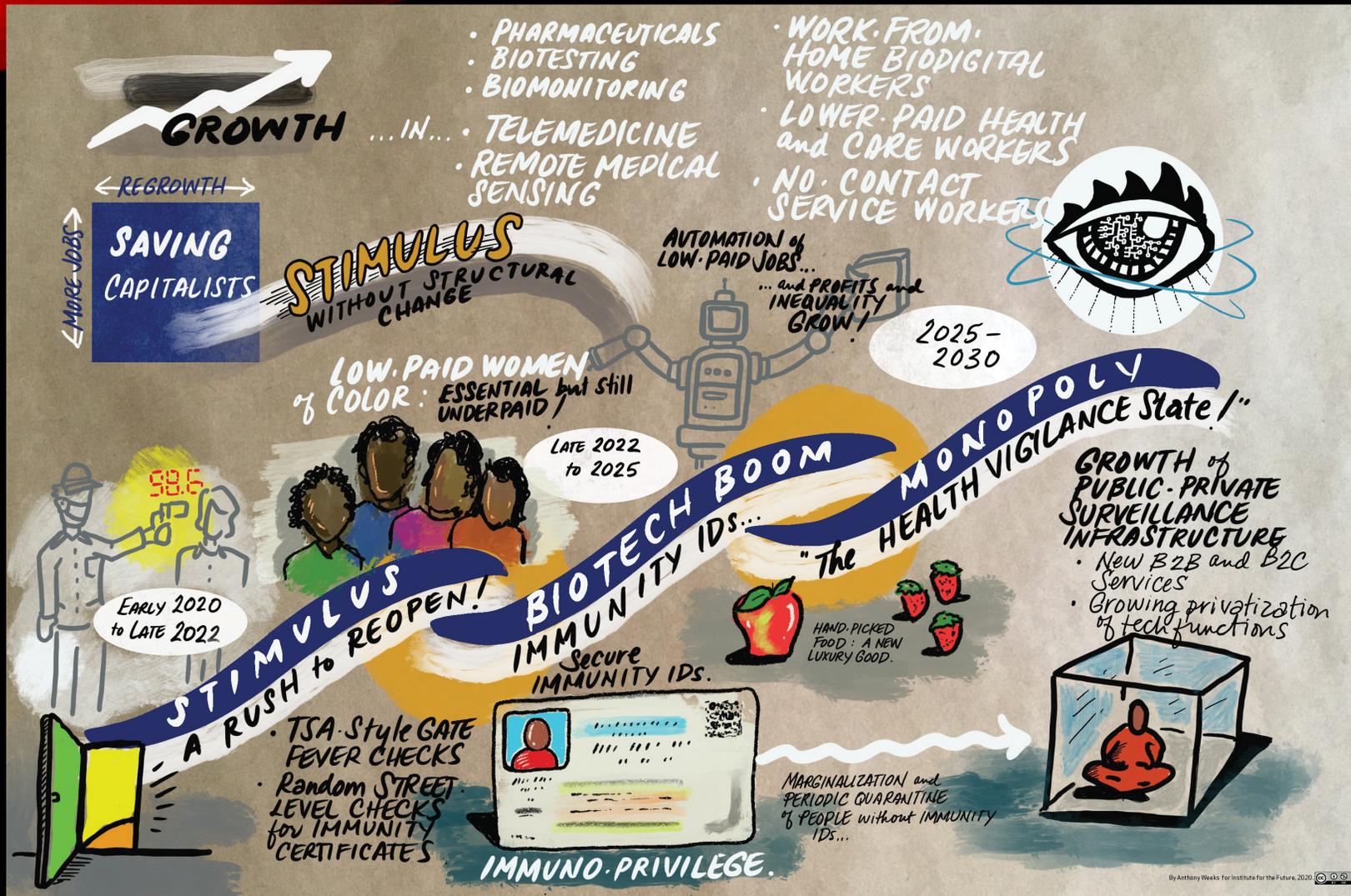
PULLING IDEAS TOGETHER/SYNTHESIZING – ANTICIPATORY ACTION

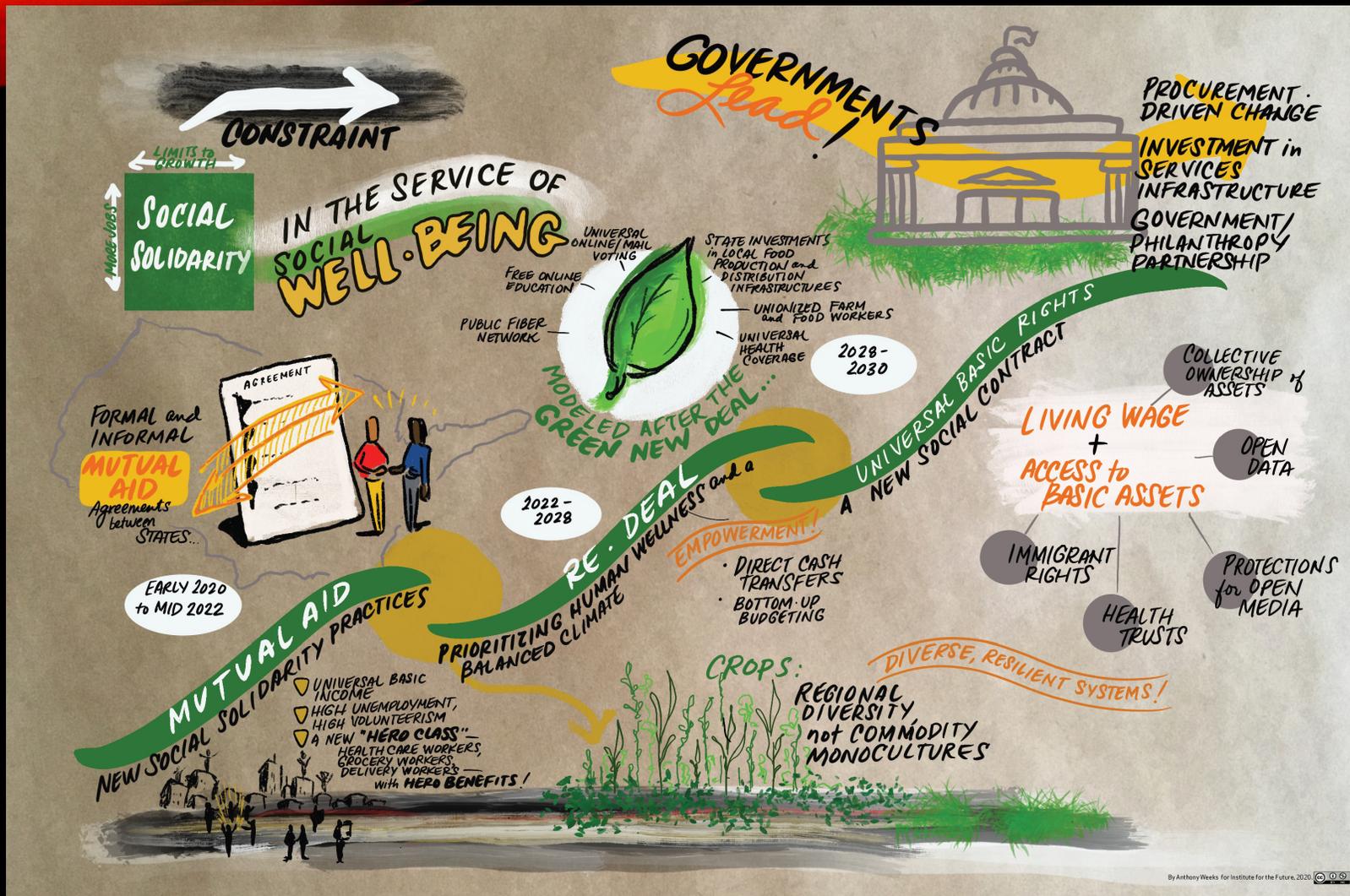
- Scenarios
- Speculative fictions
- Identity anchored futurisms
– Afrofuturism, Indigenous futurisms, Latinx, Queer, Crip, Feminist futurisms and beyond.
- Experiential futures
- Gaming and play

SCENARIOS (NEW FROM INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE WWW.IFFF.ORG)

Growth Scenario

A "rush to reopen" leads to slow and unequal regrowth of the economy—with few rewards for the low-paid heroes of the pandemic response



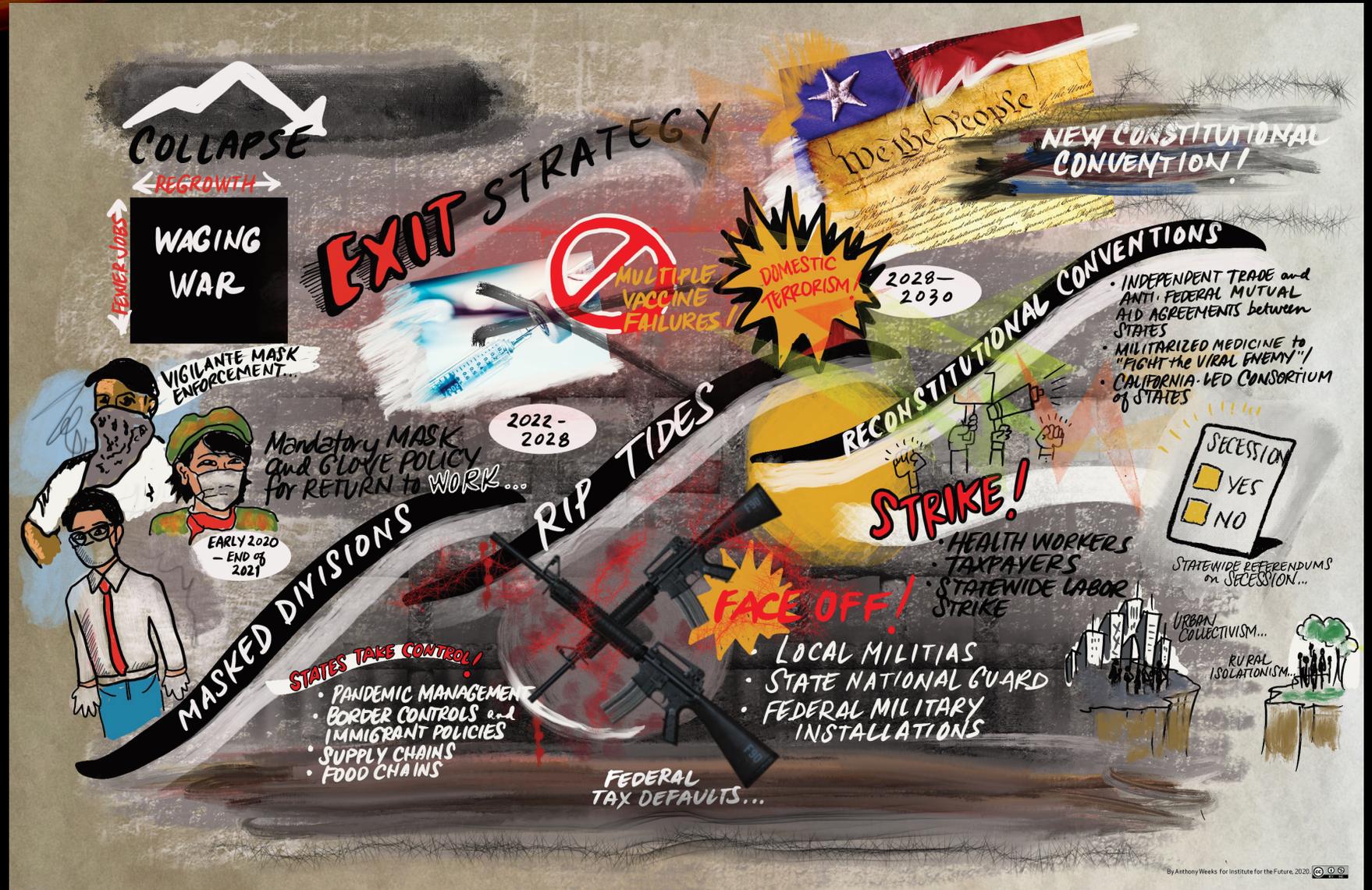


Constraint Scenario

Flattening the curve signals a willingness to sacrifice the economy for human solidarity—with universal basic income and assets.

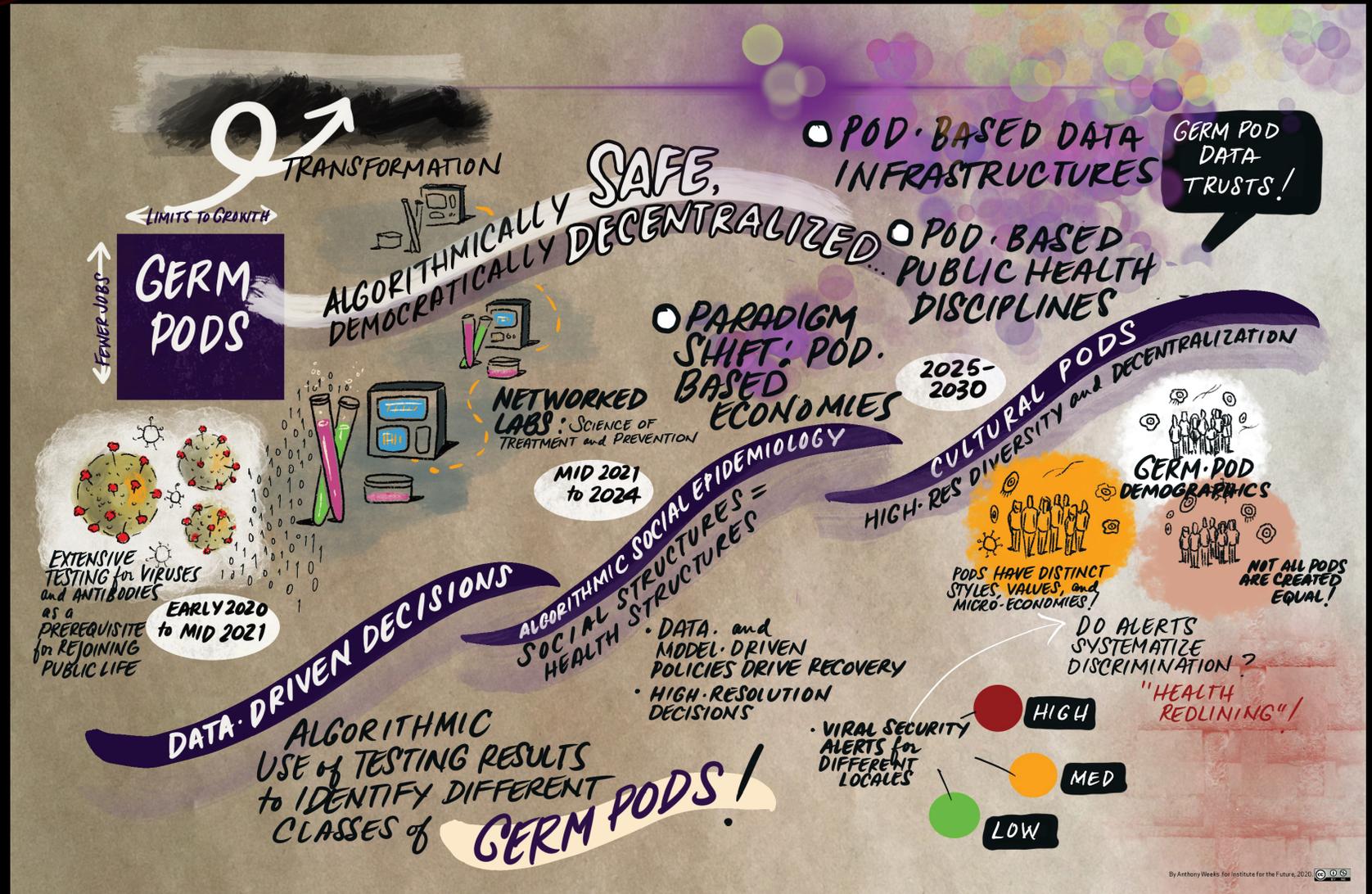
Collapse Scenario.

Minimal mitigation leads to repeating viral spikes—exaggerating underlying divisions and splitting loyalties across and within states.



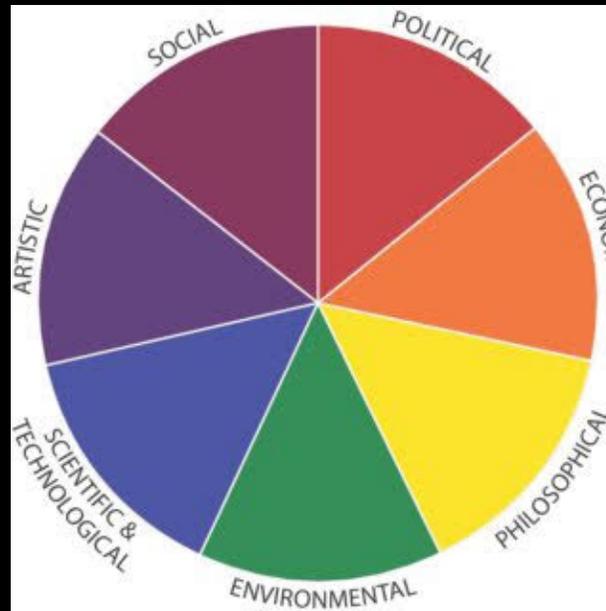
Transformation Scenario

Extensive contract tracing reveals hubs of disease and immunity—fomenting new cultural identities across the networked world.



LEAH ZAIDI – POST COVID REORGANIZATION SCENARIOS

www.multiversedesign.com



Many other scenarios from all different sectors/angles at www.socialworkfutures.com

GAMES – OPEN UP OUR THINKING



Situation Lab- The Thing from the Future

FORESIGHT-BASED PLANNING: ACTION AND RENEWAL



- Determining the 'preferred future' and prioritizing, but respecting the possibility/probability of the others.
- Foresight means challenging our own point of view regularly, preparing for multiple things on an ongoing basis (agility, humility), changing directions when called for and being willing to be surprised when the future calls.
- Still a focus on identifying where we want to go, but acknowledging that complexity and "the unexpected" will be a constant companion.
- A plan that lives, renews and evolves with the times. Change management, principles driven.

MY OWN RECLAIMING FUTURES FORESIGHT ADVENTURE

- Funded in 2000 by RWJF – worked with a futurist rather than strategic planner
- Focus: JJ reform with attention to substance use challenges of youth
- Goal: Develop innovative systems of care and opportunity as alternatives to incarceration
- Signals practice
- Analytic work
- Interpretive work
- Anticipatory action work
- Planning forward

RELATIONSHIP OF FORESIGHT TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Strategic planning is “classic” – been around for a long time
- (Classic text by Freedman defined strategy as “the gathering of power.”)
- Thinking carefully about where we want to go and developing a carefully crafted set of steps to get there. Implies a level of control and mastery “over” circumstances. Increasingly hard to pull off in the modern world.
- Research suggests that people/orgs that have a plan get further than those who don’t, but...
- How many of us have been part of strategic planning efforts that are laborious and unproductive? Unhelpful...?
- Foresight may be a method that a) people engage with and bring their curiosity along with them, b) is agile and can “bend” and renew as the world changes, c) leaves room for discovery, change and evolution.

FUTURES PRACTICE AND COVID-19



- Futurists (along with epidemiologists, virologists, and disaster preparedness folks) have been considering pandemic possibilities for years.
- Much of this preparation had not been valued for a variety of reasons.
- Classic tale of short-termism.
- Deep reckoning and accounting of the missteps along the way.
- But here we are...

YUVAL NOAH HARARI

- Not just a health/healthcare crisis, but a economic, political and cultural crisis.
- When choosing between alternatives – we have to keep the long view in focus. The storm will pass...what kind of world will we have/create on the other side?
- What short term measures will become new ways of life?
- Under the skin surveillance
- Emergency pudding and the costs of biometric monitoring
- Soap police or a revival of trust? Covid-19 as a new way to think about citizenship
- Global planning and cooperation essential – evolve from disunity

[The world after coronavirus – 3.19.2020](#)



Leah Richier
@CallMeRichier



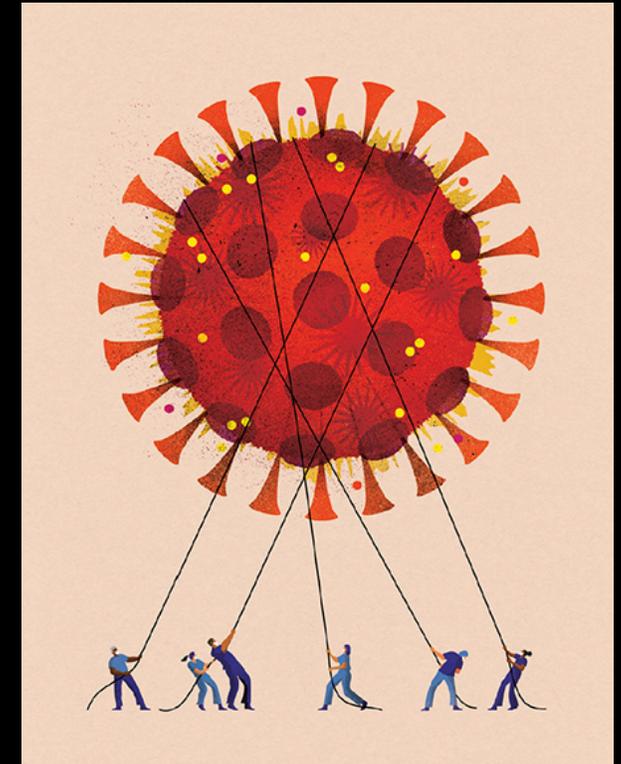
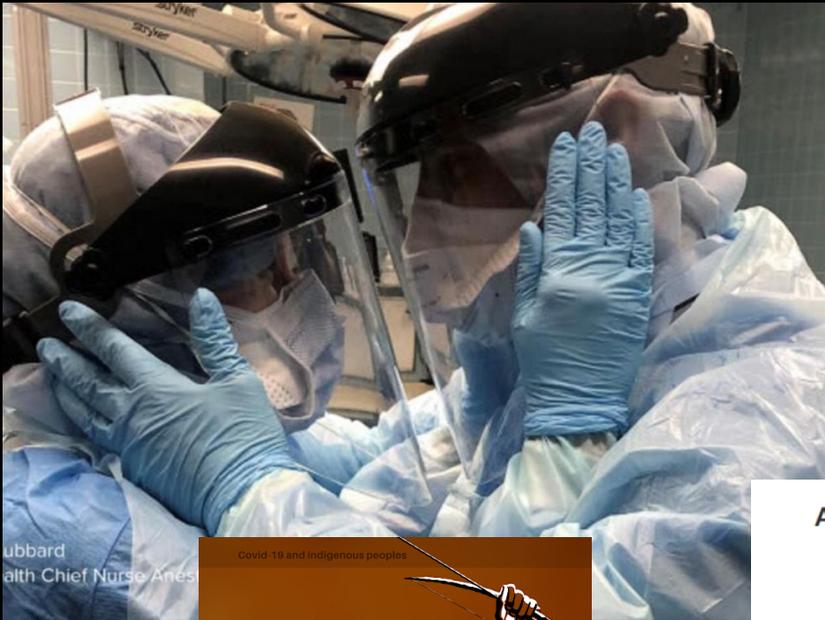
As a death historian, I feel like I'm going *mad* watching the United States stumble through a mass death event, pushing aside elderly folks & poor folks & people of color in pursuit of normalcy, summertime, & instant gratification.

We are utterly grotesque. This is horrifying.

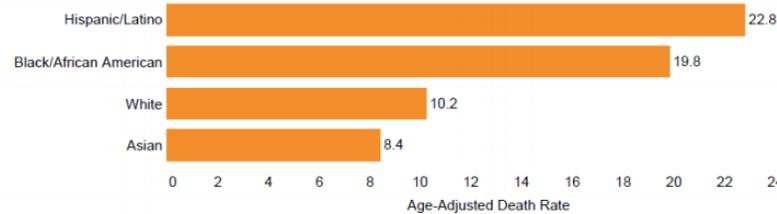
11:46 · 5/24/20 · [Twitter Web App](#)

15.4K Retweets **61.9K** Likes

WHAT DOES COVID-19 "MEAN" TO THE FUTURE?



Age adjusted rate of fatal lab confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 by race/ethnicity group as of April 6, 2020



Data complete* for 63% of deaths

Covid-19 and indigenous peoples

APIB ALERT #2

Racism and underreported cases

Covid-19 and indigenous peoples
Saturday April 18, 2020



WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO YOU
WANT TO GO BACK TO?



THINK ABOUT YOUR EMERGING FUTURISTS TOOLBOX

- Prepare to think differently
- Look at all the signals (intense right now)
- Lots of cross-impact analysis
- Lots of “meaning” analysis including learning about previous pandemics, and exploring powerful new alternatives
- Lots of analysis regarding what covid-19 has “revealed” to those that weren’t paying attention
- So many scenarios
- Preparing for many things at the same time
- Prepare to be surprised - learning, community, energy, renewal are what is needed right now

EMERGING PATTERNS AND SIGNALS

- The world will be changed (culturally, economically, scientifically, tech)
- People are awakening to the importance of having a working government after years of neglect/declining support
- Local governments are leading – but some say big government may be back (remember that social security wasn't created that long ago...)
- Trends already in play (future of work, future of entertainment, future of business, future of learning and education, future of organizations) are likely accelerating right now
- Technology proliferation on overdrive right now. Linked to “contact tracing” but surveillance nation may be emerging at full tilt without guard rails
- Mental health crisis language everywhere – global grief, loss and disruption
- Broader “realizations” about the persistent and cruel racial and economic disparities in health and well-being outcomes. People are experiencing the pain of this pandemic differently – many newly vulnerable as well.

FUTURES PRACTICE AND SOCIAL WORK



- Social work is a progressive era profession that has been operating for the last 20 years in a period of profound and powerful neo-liberal pressures.
- We are increasingly interprofessional – shows our evolution.
- We ache and we are angry all the time – moral distress.
- We are also busy because there is so much falling apart, disrupted and urgently needing our attention.
- The need for imaginative, profound levels of healing and reconstruction following covid-19 are what we were made for.
- What does it mean to “get ready” for that and all that goes along with it?
- These methods and ideas can “meet” the other things that we do so well as social workers.
- But it will require us to open up to learning, risk taking, and exploring in new ways.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR SOCIAL WORK TO BE READY FOR THE FUTURE?

- Where are our strengths?
- What are we missing/where are we stuck in our own wind tunnels?
- What *MUST* we resolve to move successfully into the future?
- What limitations do we put on ourselves?
- What opportunities are most important to avail ourselves of?
- What is most important to protect about our profession?
- What can we do that artificial intelligence cannot?



NEXT WEBINAR

- **EVOLVING ON PURPOSE – POSSIBILITY SPACES FOR THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

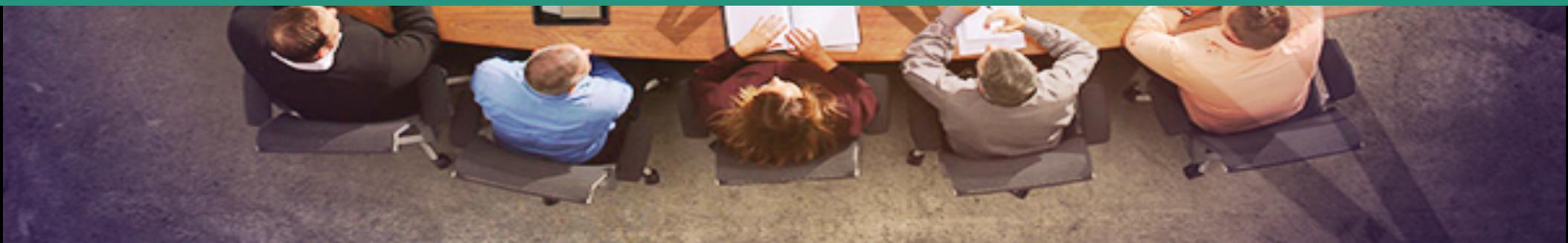
In the next and final webinar, we will dive deep into what it would mean for social work to be “ready” for the future!

Stay tuned for a top-ten futures books every social worker should read list for the next webinar!

See you there!!



Thank you for your participation



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