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USA

An Emotional Week: COVID, Abortion, Racist Mass Murder

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What a time of powerful conflicting emotions in the United States last week as we dealt with COVID, abortion rights, and a white nationalist's mass murder.

First, we learned that one million Americans had died of COVID since the pandemic began in 2019, the most of any nation in the world. President Joseph Biden had triumphantly declared on Independence Day, July 4, 2021 that we had beaten COVID—but then the Delta variant and others came along, killing another 400,000 people. Now, with a million dead, Biden ordered flags in the capital and in Federal buildings to fly at half-mast.

Epidemiologists suggested that 300,000 of those U.S. deaths were among those who refused the vaccine. They might have been prevented if not for misinformation spread by Fox News, politicians, or social media. Republicans, who have been more likely to believe the conspiracy theories about microchips in the vaccine or deaths caused by it, were both more prone to refuse the vaccine and died at higher rates than Democrats. COVID not only took lives and made millions of people sick, but it also led to business shutdowns that caused an economic recession and to school closings that set back the education of millions of children. Once again it is spring and, while mourning the deaths, we also celebrate being out in the streets again—even though COVID is growing and another wave is expected in the fall. Republicans are blocking additional funds to respond appropriately.

At the same time, on May 2, 2022, a leaked draft opinion from the U.S. Supreme Court, reported a 5-to-4 vote to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that guaranteed women's right to abortion. In reaction, on Saturday, May 14, tens of thousands of women joined 450 abortion rights rallies and marches in cities and towns across the United States to protest abortion bans. On the one hand, people at these rallies were furious with the Supreme Court and on the other hand, as one woman told me at our march in New York, they were delighted to be with so many other women and men standing in solidarity.

If the court ends federal abortion right, half the states will ban abortions, but the Republican are not letting up. Mitch McConnell, Republican leader in the U.S Senate has suggested that his party will push for a federal law banning abortions everywhere in the United States. And following the mid-term elections in November, the Republican Party may have the votes to push such legislation through both houses, though they could probably not override a presidential veto by Biden. If Donald Trump or some other Republican is elected president in 2024, with Republican majorities in both houses, abortion rights could be ended for American women.

As we were marching on Saturday for abortion rights, an 18-year-old white nationalist named Payton Gendron had murdered 10 people—eight of them black—and wounded three others in Buffalo. Police arrested the accused mass murderer who had written a 180-page manifesto in which he accused Jews of promoting immigration of non-whites, part of a worldwide replacement of the white race. He also expressed admiration for Dylan Roof, the neo-Nazi who carried out a mass murder of nine black people in a church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015 and for Brenton Tarrant who killed 51 people at an Islamic Center in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019. Gendron's manifesto included plans to go from his home to Buffalo, the nearest city with a large black population, and carry out his racist attack. He live-streamed his murderous attack on Twitch, a social media site.

We are mourning the COVID deaths, angry about women losing their abortion rights, and fearful about racist violence, all the result of our country's terrible political decisions for decades. And inflation has made everyone anxious about the economy. The country stands divided. We stand with those who defend science, believe in democracy and equality, and fight for socialism.

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