

Rejecting survival: How Trumpist denials of the COVID catastrophe impede recovery and renewal | Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

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August 27, 2021

Catastrophes are always with us. There is a large historical—one might even say evolutionary—flow from relatively stable structures, to the social breakdown that comes with catastrophe, to survivors' efforts at renewal. Such catastrophes include wars, nuclear attacks, Auschwitz-style killing factories, earthquakes, droughts, uncontrollable fires, widespread flooding, and now a lethal pandemic. With all of these catastrophes, survivors become crucial for reconstituting society.

But for societies to cope with catastrophe they must first recognize its existence. When large numbers of people reject an engulfing catastrophe, that society may become stagnant or it may become disrupted by violent conflict over the meaning of what they have experienced. Trumpists' confused rejection of the COVID-9 pandemic is a case in point.

Why are survivors so important? I have come to view survivors as a special group with particular psychological characteristics. In my work in Hiroshima in 1962, I interviewed survivors of the first use of a nuclear weapon on a human population. They were known as hibakusha, meaning "explosion-affected people."

[...]

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