

Introduction

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The COVID-19 crisis has ended and upended lives around the globe. As of April 20, 2020, the virus has killed more than 160,000 people, more than 35,000 in the United States alone. The secondary effects have also been devastating. Borders have been closed, impeding the flow of goods, people, and services. Entire countries have been placed under lockdown, bringing economic life almost to a standstill; challenging electoral, legislative, and judicial processes; and limiting direct social interactions to the nuclear family. Electronic trading technology has allowed financial markets to remain open; without the lifelines from central banks, they would have crashed.

The pandemic's secondary effects pose fundamental challenges to the rules that govern our social, political, and economic lives. These rules are the domain of lawyers. **Law in the Time of COVID-19** is the product of a joint effort by members of the faculty of Columbia Law School and several law professors from other schools. As academic lawyers we wanted to share our knowledge and insights about how law shapes responses to—and is itself shaped by—the unfolding crisis.

This volume offers guidance for thinking about some the most pressing legal issues the pandemic has raised, especially (though not exclusively) for law in the United States: from the rights of prison inmates who live under conditions that make them exceptionally vulnerable to the highly contagious virus to the options for contracting parties who now face circumstances that make it impossible for them to live up to their past commitments. The book does not give legal advice. Instead, it identifies critical legal issues that affect many peoples' lives, offers fresh perspectives for thinking about those issues, and provides guidance to legislatures and policy makers about the legal challenges ahead.

Although written by professors, this volume is meant to be a reference book, not an academic treatise. The topics range widely and include issues related to human rights, public life and social welfare, private life, and the economy. The authors focused their knowledge on specific areas of the law. Many were joined by their students, who either helped draft a chapter or compiled further resources that are referenced in the chapters. The Appendices to the volume include links to additional resources including guidance about workers' rights that the Lawyers Coordinating Committee of the AFL-CIO has put together¹ as well as links to memoranda that law firms have written to their clients on COVID-19 relevant issues.²

This volume was put together quickly; it is a response to what we perceived to be an urgent need for more legal information and analysis in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many helped bring it to the finish line: The authors who volunteered to write individual chapters on short notice and with tight deadlines; my colleagues, Bert Huang and Lance Liebman, who copy-edited the contributions; Dana Neacsu, reference librarian and lecturer-in-law, together with faculty coordinator Michael McParlane, who compiled the additional resources in the Appendices and formatted the book; the team at Columbia Creative who produced the cover; Carole Steinfield, who ensured online publication on the law school's research repository and Columbia University's academic commons; and Dean Gillian Lester, who enthusiastically supported this endeavor.

I owe all of them a big thank you—and hope that more lawyers in the United States and elsewhere will follow suit and share their thoughts and insights widely in these difficult times.

New York City, April 20, 2020.

¹ See <https://lcc-aflcio.org/covid-19-legal-issues-webinar-materials/>. We thank our colleague Mark Barenberg for alerting us to these materials.

² See also <http://covidmemo.law.stanford.edu/> for a related effort to make law firm memoranda more widely available.

