

# Ignorance Kills Too!

## People Want a Scapegoat, and the Scapegoat is Often Immigrants

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**BEFORE YOU READ:** Read the box about the scapegoat (next page). Say in your own words what a scapegoat is. Have you ever been the scapegoat in a situation or seen someone else get scapegoated?

### People Want a Scapegoat

The history of the world includes many pandemics. The plague, cholera, and smallpox have devastated populations at different times in history. Today, we understand much more about the science of viruses and how to protect ourselves. However, people still have to face a dangerous situation.

**Even if science can explain how viruses spread, people still want to blame someone.**



When people in Chinatown experienced discrimination in healthcare, they raised money to build their own hospital. The Chinese hospital still stands today. Photo from 1933. <https://www.chinesehospital-sf.org>

They want answers to their questions. They ask, “Why is this happening?” Even if science can explain how viruses spread, people still want to blame someone. One thing has not changed over time: when it comes to viruses, people want a scapegoat. And the scapegoat is often immigrants.

Look at the history of some viruses. According to Professor Alan Kraut, “Irish immigrants were blamed for cholera outbreaks in the 1830s, Jewish immigrants for tuberculosis in the late 19th century, and Italian immigrants for polio in the early 20th century.” He goes on to say that in 1900, people blamed the bubonic plague on Chinese immigrants. In San Francisco, angry people called for Chinatown to be burned to the ground. In a horrible use of government power, public health officials “forcibly seized Chinese residents on the streets and injected them with an experimental vaccine.”

### Ignorance Leads to Blame

At the end of 2019, the coronavirus appeared in China. For some, it was easy to blame all Chinese people for the virus. Newspapers reported a lot of hate speech addressed to Asian people. According to the BBC, by the end of May 2020, more than



Protesters in front of the Massachusetts State House on March 12, 2020. Photo from Asian American Commission/Facebook.

1700 people had reported discrimination because they were Asian, and people assumed they were spreading the coronavirus. Thus, anyone who looks “Chinese” becomes a target.

Coronavirus kills; ignorance kills too. Ignorance makes us blame scapegoats, which takes our attention away from the science of how viruses spread. Instead of blaming immigrants, we should learn to embrace diversity. Human diversity is not a danger but a gift.

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**Sources:** <https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/lets-stop-the-scapegoating-during-a-global-pandemic>; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862341/>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52714804> .



#### AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, how does ignorance kill?
2. Read the article on pp. 44-45. What does that article say about the dangers of ignorance?
3. Write your own essay about the dangers of ignorance. Use evidence from other texts (including these two articles if you like) and/or from your own experience.
4. For an extra challenge, read the Bible quote in the box on the right. It provides an opportunity to practice a different style of English. Look up words you don't know. Read the passage several times.

## Scapegoat: Where does the word come from?



*“The Scapegoat” by William Holman Hunt, 1854.*

In the Bible, there is a story of two goats. One is sacrificed, and the other is released into the desert, carrying with it all the sins and impurities of the people. The second goat, the one who “escapes,” is called the scapegoat. Here are two verses from the Bible that tell part of the story:

*“Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.”*

— *Leviticus, 16.21-22*