

Article 1

When the Mundane Becomes Heroic

These are the people still working on a single block in Manhattan.

Zoab Siddiqui working at his father's newsstand on the corner of 72nd Street and Broadway, on the Upper West Side.

Credit...**Text by Devi Lockwood Photographs by Damon Winter** March 28, 2020

On March 20, in an effort to control the growing number of coronavirus cases in New York — New York City in particular — Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo issued an [executive order](#) requiring all nonessential businesses to keep their workers at home. Restaurants, grocery stores, pharmacies, convenience stores and hardware stores are all deemed essential, and all are allowed to remain open.

Damon Winter walked one block in Manhattan — on 72nd Street between Broadway and Columbus Avenue — to conduct an informal photographic census of the businesses still open and the people who were working in the hours before Governor Cuomo's order went into effect.

Under normal circumstances, delivering pizza, filling prescriptions or making bubble tea might not seem heroic. But when workers across the country are being told to stay at home, service workers and pharmacists are putting themselves at risk just by doing their jobs. Simple actions like commuting to work or opening a door could expose them to the coronavirus.

In the past few weeks, New York City, a massive city by any measure, has shrunk. The block is one's village. These are the people who make it tick.



Emdadul Chowdhury.

Emdadul Chowdhury has worked at [Gray's Papaya](#), a city institution selling hot dogs and tropical drinks, since 2008, preparing food or tending the register. Only four people are working there now (compared with seven before the executive order), and it has gone from being a 24-hour operation to being open just six hours a day.

“Compared to last week, less and less people are coming into the store,” Mr. Chowdhury said. His main fear is of contracting the coronavirus on his commute from the Bronx, on a mostly empty D train. He wears gloves and a mask and washes his hands.



Chow Mok.

Chow Mok owns [Zen Medica](#), a nutritional supplement store. “Every time people come in, we’re trying to tell them to stay calm, to relax. Stress is going to compromise the immune system,” she said. “Protecting ourselves is helping to manage and support our own body’s defense, which is the immune system,” Ms. Mok added. “I get nervous too, but having more freak-out attacks is not going to help anybody.”

She has a shipment of organic hand sanitizers, medicinal mushrooms and immune-support nutrients coming in. With fewer people walking through the door, most of her business has transitioned to shipments.



Donna Schofield.

Donna Schofield owns [Stationery and Toy](#), which sells office and school supplies, party supplies, board games and, lately, a lot of toilet paper, hand sanitizer and Clorox wipes.

“It’s kind of hard to stay afloat,” Ms. Schofield said. “I might be able to manage it. I’m just going day by day right now.”

“We leave the front door open so that nobody has to touch the handle,” she added. “We’re just going with the flow. I survived Sandy. I can probably survive this, too.”



Andrew Greaves.

Andrew Greaves has delivered packages for FedEx for five years. His route extends on 72nd Street from Riverside Drive to Central Park West. “It’s like Christmas all over again,” he said. “The more people are staying home, the more they order.”

Although the volume of packages has gone up during the pandemic, some aspects of his job are easier. “The more deserted the streets are, the easier it is to deliver a package in Manhattan,” Mr. Greaves said. Another good thing is that almost everyone is at home to accept a package.

“The only thing that is weird and different is the part where someone would have to sign for a package,” he said. People are hesitant to touch the scanner. Instead, FedEx is allowing him to write “C-19” in place of a customer’s signature.

“I’m thankful to still be working, that’s for sure,” Mr. Greaves said.



Sherif Eltahawy.

Sherif Eltahawy is a pharmacist and the owner of two pharmacies on 72nd Street: Joseph Pharmacy and Wellness Pharmacy. In addition to shortening his stores’ hours, he has asked all his workers to use masks and gloves, and allows no more than five customers into each store at once.

“A lot of people are more panicked than is necessary,” he said. “It is understandable, but a lot of people are afraid that there’s going to be a shortage of their medications.”

Acetaminophen, hand sanitizer and cough medications are in short supply. “We’re trying to order from different vendors, different suppliers, to do the best we can to stock,” he said, “but it’s very limited.”

Althea Gordon.

Althea Gordon has worked for nine years as a teller at Citibank. “I’m holding on to what’s going on,” she said. “It’s hard. It’s stressful. I’m taking precautions.” At work, she says, she is using a lot of hand sanitizer. “We wash our hands often and we use Lysol inside and outside.”

Citibank has shortened her branch’s hours, but it is still open six days a week. “People are nice when they come in,” Ms. Gordon said. “They tell us that they appreciate us.”

“I love to help people and I love to work with people,” she added. “That’s why I get up every day.”



Babacar Fall.

Not surprisingly, Babacar Fall, the manager of [Gartner’s Hardware](#), has seen an uptick in sales of face masks, gloves, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizers and thermometer batteries.

“The business never goes down, honestly. I have very good customers,” he said. “We’re doing better, compared to neighbors and everybody.” He came to New York from Senegal in 1984.



Blerim Havolli.

As the resident manager of an apartment building on the block, Blerim Havolli maintains and cleans the building. He has been doing this job for eight years. With the coronavirus, “I have to clean more than any other time,” he said.

He worries about people who enter the building to deliver food or packages. “You don’t know if one of them is infected or not,” he said.

“I’m trying to be very careful because I’m the guy who has responsibility of the building at this time,” Mr. Havolli said. “If I get sick, the building isn’t going to fall down, but nobody can clean up.”

Mr. Havolli has lived in New York City since 1999. Now a U.S. citizen, he immigrated from Kosovo as a refugee.



Juan Gutierrez.

Juan Gutierrez has worked for three years as a chef at [Friedmans](#). Normally he works 40 hours a week, but that has been reduced to 15 or 20.

“The business has gone down, I imagine, by 85 percent,” he said. “It’s difficult because the store used to have a lot of employees, and many of them are without work and they have families and kids.” Before the executive order, there would be four or five others with him in the kitchen, but for now, he cooks alone, mostly for delivery. One of his colleagues started a [GoFundMe page](#) for his co-workers who are without work.



Rachel Pellerin.

Rachel Pellerin moved from Florida a month and a half ago to start a church for deaf people with her husband. She works at [Coco Fresh Tea & Juice](#) to help finance that dream.

“We stayed open and so far we have been getting a lot of delivery orders,” she said. “I’m grateful to still be able to get paid, but at the same time it can be a little nerve-racking because I know the danger of being outside.”

She and her co-workers disinfect the shop at least once an hour.



Tahmid Khan.

Tahmid Khan worked at Dunkin' Donuts for two years before quitting on Monday. He is a student in computer science at City College.

“I think that it’s irresponsible to keep the store open given the circumstance right now,” he said. “It’s not safe for me or for the customers. It was a \$15-an-hour job. I don’t care if I lose it.” He moved to New York three years ago from Bangladesh.

“I think the Dunkin’ Donuts franchise should be more responsible about their operations,” he said. “I just don’t think that they don’t care about the workers or the customers at all. They just care about the money.”



Jayang Tenzin.

Jayang Tenzin works at Pho Shop, a Vietnamese restaurant. “I’m just a server doing my work from my heart,” he said. “Times like this you have to be there for each other.” Mr. Tenzin moved to New York from Tibet eight years ago. “Got to chase the American dream,” he said.

He commutes an hour on the No. 2 train from Brooklyn. “It’s very quiet. It’s like a ghost town,” he said. “I come out of work, I don’t see anybody.”



Issouf Mande.

Issouf Mande has delivered for Domino's on an e-bike for two years. "I am scared of the virus because I'm going everywhere, opening every kind of door, going to any kind of house, meeting any kind of people," he said.

"Most deliveries I deal with the doorman or just call the person and leave it in front of the door." Mr. Mande moved to New Jersey three years ago from Burkina Faso. He doesn't understand why Domino's is still open. "I think it's not safe," he said. "We meet so many people in deliveries. I don't see enough protection."

Article 2

'White-Collar Quarantine' Over Virus Spotlights Class Divide

Child care options, internet access and extra living space leave a gulf between rich and poor in coping with disruptions to school and work.



"I'm concerned about her falling behind" in school, Betsy Rubio said of her daughter, Anahi. Their Brownsville, Texas, apartment lacks internet service.

Credit...Scott Stephen Ball for The New York Times

By Noam Scheiber, Nelson D. Schwartz and Tiffany Hsu

- Published March 27, 2020 Updated March 30, 2020

For about \$80,000, an individual can purchase a six-month plan with Private Health Management, which helps people with serious medical issues navigate the health care system.

Such a plan proved to be a literal lifesaver as the coronavirus pandemic descended. The firm has helped clients arrange tests in Los Angeles for the coronavirus and obtained oxygen concentrators for high-risk patients.

“We know the top lab people and the doctors and nurses and can make the process efficient,” said Leslie Michelson, the firm’s executive chairman.

In some respects, the pandemic is an [equalizer](#): It can afflict [princes](#) and paupers alike, and no one who hopes to stay healthy is exempt from the strictures of social distancing. But the American response to the virus is laying bare class divides that are often camouflaged — in access to health care, child care, education, living space, even internet bandwidth.

In New York, well-off city dwellers have abandoned cramped apartments for spacious second homes. In Texas, the rich are shelling out hundreds of thousands of dollars to build safe rooms and bunkers.

And across the country, there is a creeping consciousness that despite talk of national unity, not everyone is equal in times of emergency.

“This is a white-collar quarantine,” said Howard Barbanel, a Miami-based entrepreneur who owns a wine company. “Average working people are bagging and delivering goods, driving trucks, working for local government.”

Some of those catering to the well-off stress that they are trying to be good citizens. Mr. Michelson emphasized that he had obtained coronavirus tests only for patients who met guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rather than the so-called worried well.

Still, a kind of pandemic caste system is rapidly developing: the rich holed up in vacation properties; the middle class marooned at home with restless children; the working class on the front lines of the economy, stretched to the limit by the demands of work and parenting, if there is even work to be had. “I do get that there are haves and have-nots,” said Carolyn Richmond, a Manhattan employment lawyer who is advising restaurant industry clients from her second home, on Long Island, as they engineer layoffs. “Do I feel guilty? No. But I do know that I am very lucky. I understand there’s a big difference between me and the people I work with every day.”



Sag Harbor, in the East End of Long Island, draws wealthy New Yorkers. Credit...Jackie Molloy for The New York Times

In March, the federal government broadened its coverage of so-called telemedicine services through [Medicare](#), giving many more people access to a doctor over the web. Still, the technology that makes these services accessible remains out of reach for many Americans. While data on internet access is inexact, the most recent Federal Communications Commission figures, [from 2017](#), showed that 30 percent of households did not have even a slow broadband connection.

Jessica Rosenworcel, a Democratic member of the commission, said millions of Americans had only phones, often with strict caps on data usage. “Imagine using a mobile device to look up your class work, type out a paper,” she said. “No parent would choose that as the primary tool for their child’s learning.”

Like many districts around the country, the Brownsville Independent School District in Texas sought to transfer much of its curriculum online when it closed its doors this week. Schools encouraged students and teachers to use digital platforms like Google Classroom, Apple Teacher and Seesaw to keep up with lessons.

But unlike wealthier areas, Brownsville has notoriously spotty internet access. Nearly half of households there lacked broadband in 2018, putting it at the top of a list of [worst-connected cities](#) compiled by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance, an advocacy group. “We’re limited when it comes to online services in our community,” said the district’s superintendent, René Gutiérrez. “It’s not where it needs to be.”

The situation has sent many families scrambling. Anahi Rubio, 11, and her mother just moved into an apartment that lacks an internet connection. Anahi has struggled with balky access while using a laptop at her aunt’s house, where she couldn’t get the videoconferencing app Zoom to work.

“They’re always telling you to use YouTube to learn multiplication, or to look something up on Google,” said her mother, Betsy Rubio. “Online, everybody gets to be on the same page. But if not everyone has good internet, like my daughter, you don’t. I’m concerned about her falling behind.”



Credit...Scott Stephen Ball for The New York Times

Brownsville was at the top of a list of worst-connected U.S. cities for 2018.

And internet access is far from the only challenge confronting the less affluent. Marc Perrone, the president of the United Food and Commercial Workers, which represents over one million workers in industries like groceries and meatpacking, said child care was a top concern when the union held a telephone town hall this week with about 5,000 supermarket workers in New York State.

“In some cases, if they’re old enough, they’re latching them — becoming latchkey kids,” Mr. Perrone said, alluding to the option of leaving a child home alone.

Until a few weeks ago, Darlyne Dagrín would drop her 22-month-old son off at a day care facility on her way to work at a nursing home in Cedar Grove, N.J. But the center has closed temporarily amid the pandemic, leaving her with no choice but to skip work when she can’t find a friend or relative to care for him.

“This week I called out twice,” Ms. Dagrín said Wednesday. “They called me and said: ‘We won’t accept no more callouts. If you call out again you’re out of a job.’” She said she didn’t know what she was going to do for the rest of the week.

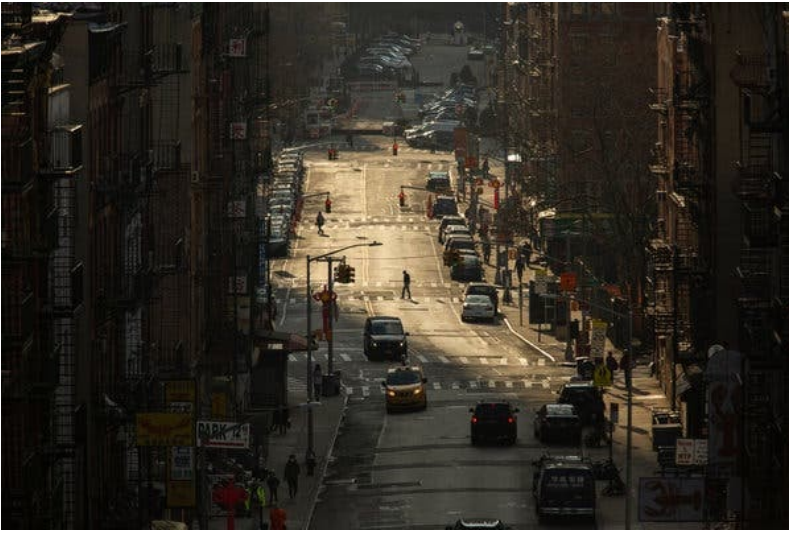
Unlike Ms. Dagrín, Maggie Russell-Ciardi doesn’t have to choose between going to work and providing child care for her young child. A nonprofit consultant in New York City and part-time yoga teacher, Ms. Russell-Ciardi can slot work around her 3-year-old son’s sleep and play schedule — even if it sometimes requires waking up in the wee hours — and simply makes do when he’s awake and active.

“It’s better for me to do my own practice when he’s sleeping,” she said of the yoga classes she now teaches online. “But it’s nice to have him growing up feeling like he’s part of the yoga community even if it’s now a virtual one. It’s an important teaching for him.”

The ability of the middle class to quickly shift life online has been striking. The Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, where roughly 100 faculty members on site teach several hundred students each week, has shifted its entire music instruction to videoconferencing. Over 95 percent of the students enrolled in private lessons have resumed their classes since the school reopened online last Friday.

By contrast, said Dorothy Savitch, an administrator, the school operates a music education program in 25 local public schools, with large numbers of children below the poverty level. Ms. Savitch said about one-third of those children might take part when the program resumes online next week, though she hopes to reach 60 percent of them eventually.

But the middle class is not free of anxiety in this pandemic moment. Otherwise-privileged people have become acutely aware of the options they lack. “For the first time in my life, I feel the difference between myself and my more affluent friends,” said Deb Huberman, a freelance television producer living on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. “I desperately want to get out of the city but I can’t afford to rent something.”



Middle-class New Yorkers who live comfortably are feeling the differences between themselves and affluent friends. Credit...Benjamin Norman for The New York Times

Ms. Huberman estimates that half the neighbors in her building have fled to second homes. Many have joined other wealthy New Yorkers in the less densely populated East End of Long Island.

“I feel guilty about friends and colleagues who don’t have the ability to leave,” said Joe Bilman, who moved with his family from Park Slope in Brooklyn to his vacation house in East Hampton. “We knew it would be easier for us to isolate and be part of the quarantine. We have a backyard and the kids can go for bike rides.”

Hamptonites have often managed to recreate the amenities of home, except with more space and beachfront views. Many children enrolled in Manhattan prep schools continue to be taught by teachers in conventional classroom formats, albeit over the internet, while public schools have frequently substituted individual study with materials supplied online.

MyTennisLessons.com advertises that “coaches are continuing to give 1-on-1 lessons” and lists a few pros available in Hamptons ZIP codes. Zabar’s, the Upper West Side food emporium, will deliver an assortment of noshes for a \$300 to \$400, depending on the distance.

“I don’t even take a markup — it’s whatever the messenger service charges me,” said Scott Goldshine, the general manager. “Obviously, for most of the people out there getting these types of delivery, money is not an issue.”

At some summer retreats, like [Martha’s Vineyard](#) and the [Jersey Shore](#), local officials have taken to [discouraging second-home owners](#) and renters for fear of overtaxing local infrastructure.

In other cases, the rich aren’t going east or west, but down. Gary Lynch, general manager of Rising S, a Texas maker of safe rooms and bunkers that range in price from \$40,000 to several million dollars, said he had added a second shift of 15 workers to handle the flood of new orders, mostly for underground bunkers.

“I’ve never seen interest like there is now,” said Mr. Lynch, who has taken to turning his phone off at night so he can get some sleep. “It has not let up.”

Article 2

They Can’t Afford to Quarantine. So They Brave the Subway.

Subway use has plummeted in recent weeks, but in poorer areas of New York City, many people are still riding.



Subway ridership has plunged since the pandemic swept across New York. But ridership has fallen less in poorer neighborhoods.

Credit...Gabriela Bhaskar for The New York Times

By Christina Goldbaum and Lindsey Rogers Cook March 30, 2020

As the coronavirus pandemic has all but shut down New York City, its subway — an emblem of urban overcrowding — has become almost unrecognizable, with overall ridership down 87 percent. But even as officials crack down on gatherings in New York, removing hoops from basketball courts and sending the police to break up parties, subway stations in poorer neighborhoods are still bustling, as if almost nothing has changed.

It is a striking turnabout for a system that has long been the great equalizer, a space where hourly workers jostled alongside financial executives. Now the subway has become more of a symbol of the city’s inequality, amplifying the divide between those with the means to safely shelter at home and those who must continue braving public transit to preserve meager livelihoods.

“This virus is very dangerous. I don’t want to get sick, I don’t want my family to get sick, but I still need to get to my job,” said Yolanda Encación, a home health aide, as she waited for her train in the Bronx.

Are you an N.Y. area health care worker? [We want to hear from you.](#)

The station she uses is one of two in the Bronx that have largely retained their ridership and serve neighborhoods with some of the highest poverty rates in the city, a Times analysis found.

The 170th Street station in the University Heights neighborhood and Burnside station in the Mount Eden area are surrounded by large Latin American and African immigrant communities where the median household income is about \$22,000 — one-third the median household income in the state, according to census data.

Many residents say they have no choice but to pile onto trains with strangers, potentially exposing themselves to the virus. Even worse, a reduction in service in response to plunging ridership has led, at times, to crowded conditions, making it impossible to maintain the social distancing that public health experts recommend.



“I don’t want to get sick, I don’t want my family to get sick, but I still need to get to my job,” said Yolanda Encación, a home health aide.

Credit...Gabriela Bhaskar for The New York Times

Across New York, nearly [66,500 people have tested positive](#) for the coronavirus and 1,218 people have died, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said on Monday. Most cases are concentrated in New York City, where over 36,000 people have tested positive.

Sitting on a bench at the 170th Street station, Ms. Encación stretched a medical mask across her face and slipped her hands into latex gloves. The risk of exposure to the coronavirus on the subway is just part of the simmering anxiety that hangs like a backdrop to her everyday life.

Her two teenage children are desperate to see their friends, but she only allows them to leave the family’s two-bedroom apartment for a walk with their aunt once a day.

Ms. Encación’s husband was a janitor at a private school until he was laid off after the school shut down, slashing her family’s income in half. They have enough savings to cover this month’s rent, but nothing more.

“Next month how will we pay? I can’t even think about it,” she said.

Ms. Encación was one of the few passengers on her line on a recent weekday after [ridership across the subway](#) plunged nearly 90 percent compared with the same day last year, according to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which runs the subway and buses.

Put differently, before the crisis erupted more than five million people squeezed onto the system every day — today, it carries fewer than 1 million.

But a Times analysis of M.T.A. data shows that ridership declines in each of the four boroughs served by the subway vary significantly and largely along socioeconomic lines.

Over the last two weeks, the steepest ridership declines have occurred in Manhattan, where the median household income is \$80,000 — the highest of any of the city’s five boroughs.

Subway ridership in Manhattan fell around 75 percent, while ridership in the Bronx, which has the highest poverty rate of any of the boroughs and the lowest median income at \$38,000, dropped by around 55 percent, according to an analysis of data of Friday morning commutes through March 20.



Ridership at the 170th Street station in the Bronx, which serves a largely poor area, has remained relatively high compared with the rest of the system. Credit...Gabriela Bhaskar for The New York Times

The Burnside Avenue and 170th Street stations serve some of the people most vulnerable to the economic and public health threats sweeping New York.

In areas bordering the stations, roughly half the children live in poverty, 40 percent of the population was born outside the United States and one in four residents does not have a high school diploma.

At the 170th Street station, riders still come in waves every morning: Men tend to arrive first, swiping into the station before dawn. Wearing paint-splattered jeans and carrying battered hard hats, they board trains to construction sites.

Later, many women trickle onto the platform, mostly nurses and home health aides who have been deemed essential workers.

Others are home cooks and nannies for the well-to-do, hoping to keep their jobs as long as possible in an unraveling economy.

Sulay Liriano, 40, was at the 170th Street station, starting her commute to Queens. A personal care aide, she had received an email from her employer the day before instructing her and her colleagues in bold, red letters that they were considered “ESSENTIAL” and must show up for work.



“It’s the riskiest part of my day, taking the train,” said Sulay Liriano. Credit...Gabriela Bhaskar for The New York Times

On the one hand, Ms. Liriano is grateful to still have an income: Her husband, who had worked at a restaurant helping with deliveries and odd jobs in the kitchen, had been let go.

But Ms. Liriano is anxious about the two and a half hours she spends every day huddling with strangers in an enclosed subway car. For years, she made her work commute without giving it much thought.

Now she scans every pole, every seat, every person, as if looking for signs of an invisible enemy. She is hyper-aware of where she keeps her hands, resisting the urge to fix a fallen strand of hair or wipe a stray lash from her eyelids.

“I am worried, really,” said Ms. Liriano, who has not been able to find a face mask since panicked shoppers emptied neighborhood store shelves. “There are still many people here, people I don’t know, I don’t know what precautions they are taking, if they are sick.

“It’s the riskiest part of my day, taking the train,” she added.

The M.T.A. has tried to protect its diminished ridership: It has deployed cleaners to disinfect train cars and buses every three days with the same disinfectants used in hospitals and nursing homes.

But hobbled by a growing number of workers falling sick and the free fall in ridership, the agency has cut subway service by 25 percent.

“Service is constrained by the number of crews we have available during this crisis — not surprisingly, absences are in the thousands,” said Sarah Feinberg, interim president of New York City Transit.

As of Monday, seven M.T.A. workers had died from the coronavirus while at least another 333 workers had tested positive and 2,700 were quarantined, officials said. The chairman of the M.T.A., Patrick J. Foye, also has the infection.



A rider sprays Lysol on a MetroCard machine at the Burnside Avenue station in the Bronx. Credit...Gabriela Bhaskar for The New York Times

Outside the 170th Street station, the streets are nearly empty. Most stores have shuttered, their metal security gates pulled closed. The only places open were two pharmacies, where lines of customers curled out the front doors.

A short ride on the No. 4 train is the Burnside Avenue station. Every morning riders still stream onto its outdoor platforms.

Cindy Garcia, a caseworker at a homeless shelter in Manhattan, kept her hands tucked deep inside her pockets. Her disinfecting regimen at work is meticulous: Every pen a client touches, every doorknob she grabs, every chair she sits on she wipes down with Lysol.

When she meets with a client, they sit on opposite ends of the room.

But on the train, Ms. Garcia has no illusion about having that kind of control. She can keep her hands covered, she can wear a mask, but it is impossible to stay the recommended six feet away from other riders.

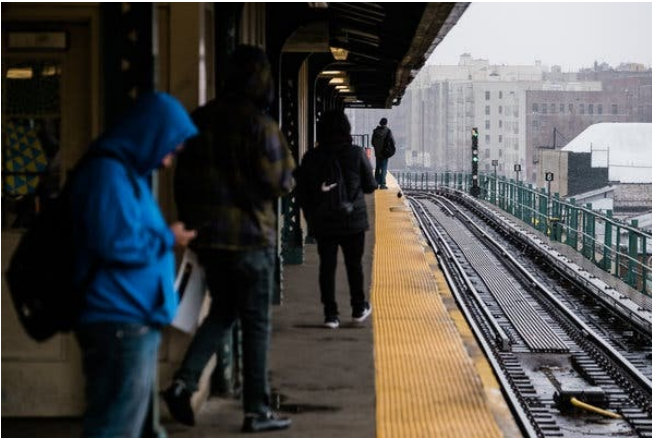
“Just look at these subway cars, they’re still crowded,” she said.

The No. 4 train was among the lines where service was reduced, a policy that health officials warn could lead to packed trains and increase health risks for the essential workers, including health care employees, who need to ride them.

Still, for other riders, the possibility of contracting the coronavirus was the least of their concerns.

Daouda Ba, a 43-year-old immigrant from Senegal, sat hands tucked between his knees at the Burnside Avenue station.

Mr. Ba lives in a nearby shelter, where he says more than 50 men share three bathrooms. The idea of disinfecting doorknobs or even having hand sanitizer is laughable. Just getting time at the sink to wash his hands is hard enough.



Subway ridership has fallen to lows not seen since the opening weekend of the century-old system. Credit...Gabriela Bhaskar for The New York Times
“I’m already stuck in a crowded box in the shelter, I can’t do anything for my health,” he said, looking at the other people standing nearby. “The only thing I’m worried about is the economic stuff.”

Mr. Ba was laid off from his job working for a sightseeing bus tour company at the end of December. His boss said they would hire him back by the end of March, but now his job prospects are as uncertain as ever.

On a recent morning, a friend had called with a small, paying job: Someone was moving out of their apartment and needed a hand. He sat waiting for the train to take him to Brooklyn, the rin-tin-tin of light rain hitting the metal awning.

“If I die, I die,” he said.

Christina Goldbaum is a transit reporter covering subways, buses, ferries, commuter rails, bicycles and all the other ways of getting around New York. Before joining The Times in 2018, she was a freelance foreign correspondent in East Africa. [@cegoldbaum](#)