

The War Against Public Health
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Science and public health have immeasurably improved our lives. We do not die from foul water (Flint Michigan the exception), our streets do not reek from horse manure and human waste (homeless encampments sometimes the exception) and most of us have never lost a child to Polio, Measles, and Smallpox, or a burst appendix, the great killers of children in the past.

Nobody with a modicum of education doubts the value of Public Health and its guidance---until now. I can remember when we heeded our pediatricians to get the rounds of inoculations for our babies that kept them safe. I remember the relief of our parents when two doctors produced the first vaccines that protected us from Polio. And I knew few people who rejected the annual Flu shots that enabled most of us to survive what might have otherwise morphed into a mass killer (the 1918 Flu pandemic).

But an ugly and malicious troll has been born: the Anti Vax (anti vaccine) movement, one that resulted from a stupid medical article in Lancet Journal, in which a discredited doctor claimed that childhood vaccinations caused autism in children. Although the article was withdrawn and publicly denounced, it enjoyed a second life on the Internet where it was believed by desperate families with autistic children.

People who do not engage in critical thinking are vulnerable to wishful thinking: wanting answers to things they perceive as unsolved. They also believe that the educated elites, scientists and government officials, are hiding the truth from them for some nefarious reason. They are aided in this delusion by someone else who finds benefit in sowing discord and division in the US: Putin. He didn't create this stupid belief, but he uses it for his own purposes in his open (and clandestine) support of Donald Trump, our own conspiracy buff who scorns science.

Thanks to this poisonously anti-science movement, the United States, once the most admired model of scientific achievement, has the worst pandemic consequences in the world in number of cases and death toll, with no remedy in sight until the current president is removed from office.

The concept of public health dates back to antiquity, when Crete and Rome built clean water and sewage systems. During the Medieval Bubonic Plague pandemic, health officials ordered quarantines (40 days) of shutdown to stem the infections. We learned something important from that: public health orders must be enforced. Rule scoffers then were jailed or in some cultures, executed. Public health does not work "voluntarily."

President George Washington, unlike today's White House cynical inhabitant, believed in science and ordered his entire army to be inoculated for smallpox (very new science then). Some of his back-country recruits grumbled but obeyed.

Our ancestors were neither brighter nor stupider than people today. The bright ones invented science and the scientific method, and the stupid ones rejected anything new as an attack on their religions or freedom. Fortunately, the Darwinian survival of the fittest kept more smart ones alive than stupid ones, provided that the leadership was among the smarter. Good leaders earned obedience from good citizens, while bad citizens had to be compelled.

There are exceptions, however, even among the educated. During the 19th century, science discovered germs and hand washing. Some doctors, vain and stubborn, rejected hand washing as "insulting." Their resistance resulted in many women dying in hospitals during childbirth and unfortunate presidents who had been shot dying from infections caused by unwashed doctors' fingers, probing their wounds. Presidents Lincoln and Garfield were victims of this stupidity.

For a country that was once the model of scientific achievement, with widespread trust of the government's scientific institutions, we have now succumbed to the old divisions of intelligent and stupid. The intelligent wear masks, wash hands, and keep space between them and others. The stupid ones jam church services, bars, and Trump Rallies. Recently "Bikers for Trump" held their own event, stupid enough to risk their lives on motorcycles, unmasked, unwashed, and proud of their "freedom" and "manliness."

Now, President Trump has become infected with Covid, after holding unmasked

superspreader events. Science trumps demagoguery.

684 words

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