

The Real Pandemic: Lies
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A new virus, the coronavirus, is sweeping the world. When our hunter-gatherer ancestors began settling in villages, towns, and later cities, and when they began livestock agriculture, diseases have spread from animal hosts to human beings, with no immunity at first. Throughout history, China, India, and Africa have been the incubators of disease outbreaks that then became worldwide.

In China, the problem was crossovers from animals kept for food use, starting with flu from swine, then to wild animals marketed for food. Smallpox morphed from cows to humans in India. Black Plague was carried by fleas, and then Mongols used bodies dead from plague as a biological weapon, throwing them over the walls of a Ukrainian city they were attacking.

Tropical diseases such as Yellow Fever, Cholera, and Malaria traveled from Africa through trade routes to go international. Mortality rates from all of these diseases were high, until successive bouts increased the immunity of most people. Our present-day demographics are proof that we are stronger than the lethality of diseases.

But along with every pandemic comes conspiracy theories and mindless violence, people ready to believe anything rather than their leaders. In the past, leaders survived by lying when necessary, quick to distract the ignorant with conspiratorial targets. Also, historically, leaders lost their power when no longer believed by their people. In China, dynasties collapsed and new emperors emerged when people lost confidence in their rulers having a "mandate from Heaven."

Most Americans have shrugged off Trump, who lies all the time. Some presidents and many officials have been deceptive from time to time, and when caught, apologize or leave office. But not this one, who reflexively lies about everything: from the size of his Inaugural crowd, to claims of all sorts of facts that "a lot of people say," "everybody knows," and to his latest: his "hunch" that the World Health Organization has "a false number" of coronavirus fatalities. He followed that zinger with: "I have great intuition. Doctors are amazed at how much I know about this virus. Perhaps I should have been a doctor instead of President."

We laugh, but we should cry instead. Putin, like Trump, is playing down the danger of coronavirus, "fake news" and is feeding his Internet propaganda machine with conspiracy theories. In China, where this virus first erupted, President Xi tried to conceal the outbreak, even punishing the doctor who blew the whistle. The doctor died of the virus, and Xi had to come clean, too late to keep the disease from going global.

Liars in power need loyal liars around them, a ploy that works for a while. But perhaps it takes a life-threatening plague to make us stop laughing at clownish lies and start seeing them as no longer funny. Trump lies about the seriousness of the disease, lies about the numbers affected, about the government's actions to combat it, about how long it will take for a vaccine to develop. He disputes the very experts he brings to the microphone with him.

His actions are not fooling the educated, who are calling him out. But they continue to fool the cadre of fools who think he is their hero, fighting the good fight against the snooty press, the scientists, and all experts they see "looking down on them."

The more serious pandemic is the "infodemic," the swirling conspiracy networks offering fake causes (a Canadian secret weapon), to Putin's "fake news" (let's blame the messenger), and the people who promote either Trump's lies or conspiracy theories.

Fortunately, lies will eventually out. Trump's loyalist liars are facing consequences. Attorney General Bill Barr has been chastised by a judge who condemns Barr's lies about the Mueller Report. The judge found that there was collusion with Russia, which Barr had dismissed.

Trump's Republican congressional toadies are being outed as liars. Poor VP Pence! Representative Jim Jordan, Trump's loudest Pitbull, faces outing by former college wrestlers, for whom he was a coach, that he denied knowing that the team doctor was molesting them. He knew because they told him.

Lying is no laughing matter. In governance, it can be fatal.

685 words.

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