

# WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THESE BRIGHT MINDS?

by Nidra Poller



What has happened to these bright minds? As the world faces a pandemic of historic proportions, the novel coronavirus, these American thinkers have retreated to a provincial village where they ply a cottage industry of neo-relativism, backbiting, and conspiracy theories. Their worldview has shrunk to the narrow confines of a petty America locked in tribal feuds. They write vehement articles that are outdated before they appear, hammer away at a few restricted themes, twist the data, repeat themselves and each other... No dissenting voice can be heard in the din.

Columbus discovered America by taking a wrong turn on the way to the Indies. Have these commentators, misguided by one ignorant declaration, headed into an impasse mistaken for the golden road to American greatness?

Enter Wuhan

December 2019: As images of doomed patients surrounded by “astronauts” in hazmat suits entered the news stream here in France, we suddenly discovered a city named Wuhan, population [11 million](#), where skyscrapers jostle with a notorious wet market presumed to be the source of a new lethal virus. As the entire province of Hubei went into a lockdown unlike anything seen in modern times, we witnessed the return of French citizens evacuated from the stricken city we’d never even heard of before. Epidemiologists, virologists, public health specialists and endearing GPs became our daily media fare.

We learned the morphology and operating method of a SARS-type virus against which human beings have zero immunity. It could only be checked by drastic measures. The range of outcomes was perplexing. Most people were asymptomatic, others suffered anything from a "common cold" to something like "influenza," and some were precipitated into a brutal downward cycle and agonizing death.

We rapidly integrated the possibility that this virus might reach us and spread everywhere, replicating the infamous "Spanish" flu that killed millions in 1918-20. Unless it was just some awful thing that happens in China. Air traffic between Europe and China was halted before the end of January. An ominous warning came from the exponential rise in coronavirus infections aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship blocked off the coast of Yokohama since February 4<sup>th</sup>. The virus was spread in South Korea by a Doomsday sect—the Shincheonji Church of Jesus the Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony. Then it hit the Veneto region of Italy, our next door neighbor.

All of this seemed like a distant echo in the United States. Donald Trump, still holding mass rallies at home, reveled in the crowd of 100,000 (sic) that greeted him and Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad on February 24th. Four days later, at CPAC, then acting cabinet chief Mick Mulvaney set the tone: The coronavirus is serious, the administration is hands-on, no country is better equipped to deal with this kind of crisis. The media are whipping up a panic because Democrats think this virus scare will finally topple the president.

The battle lines were drawn and the shooting began. If Democrats wanted to use the virus to ruin the economy and sabotage Trump's triumphant re-election, then his supporters would prove that the scare, if not, the virus itself, was a hoax.

The outside world, where Covid-19 was forging ahead and one

country after the other went into some form of lockdown, disappeared. Within fortress America, *la résistance* took the form of neo-relativism: People die all the time from all sorts of causes. The flu, for example, kills tens of thousands.

January 30: Early out of the starting gate, [Jeffrey Koons](#) warned “Coronavirus: Dems Rooting for a Global Pandemic.” “Russiagate didn’t work; Ukraine didn’t work; the economy is growing at a healthy rate. Nothing works against this president – but maybe the coronavirus will do it! ... Things would have to be a lot worse than in 2002-3, when there were 8,098 cases and 774 deaths worldwide.” BIRD FLU?

March 4: Confiding in Fox News host Sean Hannity, President Trump said he had a hunch, based on conversations with a lot of people, that the 3.4% mortality rate was a false number; a lot of people will get a very mild case, won’t even need to call a doctor, they’ll stay home for a few days ... or go to work, yes, they can go to work.

[Brian C. Joondeph](#) uses the colorful term “Codswallop” to describe the Democrat agenda in general and the hysterical fearmongering over coronavirus in particular. Noting that in the first week of March there were 3,646 deaths worldwide, fifteen of them in the US, he wisely concluded: “The odds of recovering are far higher than the odds of dying.”

[Douglas MacKinnon](#) warns (March 10): The Media-Induced Coronavirus Panic Is Worse Than The Disease: “... when it’s all said and done and this strain of the coronavirus has run its course – as it will with a far smaller infection and fatality rate than the yearly flu ... the financial punishment will be truly catastrophic.”

[Heather Macdonald](#) deplores the “misguided response to Covid-19” (March 13) “Fear-mongering news stories” should begin by admitting that there is a total of 41 deaths in the United States, half of them from a “poorly run nursing home

outside of Seattle.” The chances of dying from the disease in America are infinitesimal compared to the economic damage. In 2018-19, 34,200 people died from influenza. The annual death toll from automobile accidents is 38,800. Even if the current Covid-19 fatality rate were multiplied by a factor of one thousand, it would outnumber traffic deaths by a mere 2,200.

MacDonald nonchalantly brushes off those potential casualties by noting that no children under the age of 9 had died, while 89 percent of the Italian victims were over 70, “nearing the end of their lifespans...[and] might have ... died from another illness”

hydroxychloroquine

The fervent belief in the miraculous qualities of hydroxychloroquine further minimized the gravity of the pandemic. In his in-depth report on the controversial French professor Didier Raoult, [Scott Sayare](#) gives a timeline of the introduction of hydroxychloroquine into the American arena. It began, he says, with the publication (March 16) by Gregory Rigano—who falsely presented himself as an adviser to Stanford Medical School—of a google-doc fake scientific report on the benefits of hydroxychloroquine in the treatment of Covid-19. Fox News host Lara Ingraham picked up the information, added prophylaxis, and announced the drug was a “game-changer.” Sean Hannity began promoting hydroxychloroquine. Rigano appeared on Tucker Carlson’s show and claimed that Raoult’s study had shown a 100% cure rate. At the March 19th White House task force briefing, President Trump declared: “... it could be a game changer.”

Ignoring the thorough information in Sayare’s article that intelligently covers the full range of the scientific and ideological debate ongoing in France over the treatment aggressively promoted by Professor Raoult, the commentators cited here locked the debate into the tribal schema: Because President Trump talks it up, the Democrats have to shoot it

down. Asked how he is qualified to judge the effectiveness and safety of a given drug, trade advisor Peter Navarro replied that he has a PhD in the Social Sciences and knows how to evaluate a report. Later he would claim that China sent its citizens traveling all over the world to deliberately spread the virus.

In a retrospective posted on May 11<sup>th</sup>, “The sky is falling, run for your life, shelter in place – you fools!” [Diane Bederman](#) suggests the refusal to recognize the effectiveness of hydroxychloroquine for prophylaxis and treatment of Covid-19, established in a “peer-review published report,” [sic] is explained by vested interests in a more expensive drug, remdesivir. And Dr. Fauci is involved. Former CBS investigative journalist, [Sharyl Attkisson](#) also claims that those “disparaging” the prophylactic and treatment merits of hydroxychloroquine have financial ties to Gilead Science, developers of Remdesivir.

### The Swedish model

Despite strict confinement measures, the death toll in Italy rose far above the reported fatalities in Wuhan. As the virus spread from one European country to the next, some Americans were increasingly convinced of the nation’s invulnerability. They were encouraged by soothing declarations from the president, and the illusion of a minimal case level, induced by inadequate testing. The only European country that deserved approval from this corner was Sweden. Its bad image in conservative media—cowardly surrender to Islamization, Malmo the hotspot of antisemitism—melted under the heat of infatuation. Was the model re-examined when Sweden registered 4,000 fatalities for a population just over 10 million (as compared to Israel, 281 in a population just over 9 million)? Except for [Judith Bergman](#), they dropped the subject.

Asking “Is This a pandemic or a dempanic?” [Joan Swirsky](#) accuses Communist China of waging germ warfare and Democrats

of weaponizing a virus that will soon disappear like its more lethal SARS cousins. "... is this yet another hysterical, sky-is-falling? *Every day* 130 Americans die from an opioid overdose, 102 people from car accidents, and 2,500 from heart attacks. And yet, so far in America, 19,000 people have contracted the corona virus and 256 have died from it. Thank God for the cool, calm, collected and seasoned business mogul, President Donald J. Trump, who is guiding us." She calls him "the. smartest. guy.in.the.room."

"spiked," the blogger, praises the good consequences of [Sweden](#)'s outlier approach, "*intolerable* to the pro-lockdown hardliners." Biderman [above] anoints Sweden the only country that defended its freedom against the coronavirus tyranny.

Words will not stop the pandemic

The anti-hysteria discourse becomes increasingly obsessive, repetitive, and virulent in defense of confused government policies.

The sudden ban on travel from Europe caused appalling jams as Americans, thinking they too had to come home before dark, crammed into the seven approved airports. By that time, the virus was already running on domestic steam. The stock market crashed, healthcare workers begged for PPE, governors lamented having to bid against FEMA for desperately needed material. As the death toll, largely fed by the New York hotspot, rose, the flood of copycat articles swelled, nourished by respected signatures and overnight specialists.

In his weekly articles on the *American Greatness* site, [Roger Kimball](#) embellished his keep cool-vision of the unfolding pandemic with highbrow literary references and Latin phrases.

[March 7](#): "They" are trying to make it into a new plague, but President Trump stopped it in its tracks with the brilliant decision to suspend US-China flights at the end of January. Governor Cuomo declared a state of emergency in New York,

where only 78 people have tested positive. Nationwide there have only been 19 deaths.

[April 4th](#) he insists on the distinction between “dying from the virus [or] with the virus. This theme would bob up on the ocean of corpses through April and May.

By [April 25th](#) the death toll from “the insidious cold bug brought to the world by the Chinese Communist Party” had considerably risen ... but it was declining almost everywhere. Except for public health officials and Democrats, everyone thinks “the job is nearly done.” Sweden’s mild regime has given results “almost indistinguishable from ... Norway” with its strict regime.

He beats the same drum on the Turnkey radio show on [May 5<sup>th</sup>](#). Bopping in after the super cool dude’s riff in praise of the Swedish model, Kimball bonks on the Left for instilling fear in American hearts! Fear of the virus that causes the common cold! In my town, you can’t go into a store without a mask!

Bêtes noires

When scientific advice contradicts the president’s zigs and zags, his defenders find communists, socialists, Left-leaning friends-of-the-Democrats under every white coat. A head rises, they chop it off. Fauci, Cuomo, Tedros, WHO, China... The president wants the churches open for Easter. It’s a beautiful example of optimism. He speculates on finding a way to project strong sunlight into the body and to inject a disinfectant directly into the lungs; it’s the fault of the NY Times for making a big deal of it. People are looking for solutions, it’s normal.

The president uses the daily White House press briefings to sing to his own glory. They join in the choir. He insults reporters with low blows; they praise his robust defense against biased media.

The death toll rises, unemployment increases, long lines of cars at the food banks, frustration turns to rage over the lockdowns. Defiant anti-lockdown demonstrators in harlequin American flag outfits and MAGA caps, sometimes carrying firearms and/or antisemitic signs, demand freedom. The president insists it's time to reopen. He says the demonstrators are wonderful people.

When it has become glaringly obvious that this pandemic is nothing whatsoever like influenza, the minimizers make their last stand on the battlefield of freedom. At no time have they opened their hearts to the victims of Covid-19. All the losses are expendable. They apparently have never spoken to a victim. They never attempted to describe the concrete realities of the disease. Totally indifferent to the methods and results of confinement in Europe, Japan, or Israel, they make lockdown a partisan issue. Democratic governors are fascists, socialists, communists, enemies. And where lockdown (which looks quite sloppy from here in France) did work to flatten the curve and preserve hospitals from breakdown, the relatively decent figures are flouted as evidence that it was not necessary. Or could have been done properly, by simply protecting the vulnerable. Obesity? Diabetes? Cardiac conditions? Would anyone suggest keeping the overweight at home and letting the slim Jims out on the loose?

The real disaster is not the pandemic

After minimizing the ravages and dangers of the novel coronavirus, they maximize the destruction wrought by the lockdowns. [Roger Kimball](#) praises Evangelicals; they defy the lockdowns because they, at least, love freedom. Anthony Fauci and Neal Ferguson are ludicrously accused of triggering worldwide lockdowns. Biderman [above]: "Two men and one Global organization managed to accomplish what two world wars could not, the near destruction of Western culture and the end of freedom." Ferguson and Fauci, the WHO-Chinese government propaganda machine, the Chinese Virus, made to frighten us,

shut down our economies, and end our freedom of movement. Ferguson is guilty of scare-modeling, and Dr. Fauci of contributing millions to help the Wuhan Institute of Virology improve the capacity of bat coronavirus to infect human cells. The damage done to our society will endure for two generations, she moans. All of this for a virus that primarily kills people over 80.

[Allysia Finley](#) sketches a profile of “the lockdown skeptic they couldn’t silence,” Aaron Ginn, the Silicon Valley technologist who, in an essay posted on the Medium website, expressed concern that Western governments were relying on questionable Chinese data ... and copying their response to the virus. He saw no evidence that lockdowns suppressed the spread or reduced the fatality rate of the virus.

On May 15<sup>th</sup>, Finley praises the Swedish model: there’s a good chance they’ve achieved herd immunity by allowing the young and active to mix freely and protecting the elderly. “Dr. Tegnell said this week that the declining number of cases in Stockholm supports this possibility.”

[Eileen Toplansky](#) (May 16) accuses Democrat-controlled states of using the pandemic to control people’s lives, and accuses [Eric Levitz](#) at *Intelligencer* of “barely concealed glee” in writing that the pandemic threatens to kill 100,000 Americans.

[Carey M. Golden](#) wants to “checkmate run-amok COVID-19 states” and hopes we will soon be able to forget “the pronouncements of ‘experts’ like the little gnome man and the scarf lady, and ubiquitous signs and messages that implore us to stay home and stay safe (OBEY!)” All of this coronavirus hype has devious political goals, such as harming the economy to harm President Trump, raking in federal money and “getting rid of costly old people to beef up state finances.”

[Pamela Geller](#) quotes Gordon Chang’s accusation that President Xi Jinping maliciously attacked all nations of the world,

pressuring them to allow air travel from China, deliberately and knowingly spreading this dangerous virus everywhere. [[Daniel A. Bell](#) gives evidence that the alleged flights from China were either cancelled or rerouted.]

[Carol Brown](#) describes the pandemic lockdown as “a mass scale human experiment in government control and it turned out that stripping away our freedom wasn’t all that difficult. /Stay home. Do not go out. Do not earn money. Do not pay your bills, feed your family, maintain your credit rating, live your life. Do not make a single move without permission from the State or you will be punished.”

Old people are imprisoned in nursing homes, contact tracing is the new frontier in fascist technology, we’ve been bombarded with lies and inflated mortality rates, all in the plot against Trump. [Dennis Praeger](#) aptly wrote, says Brown: “Economic disasters rarely remain only economic disasters. To give a particularly dramatic example, the Nazis came to power because of economics more than any other single reason....”

And we have been led into “a disaster of monumental proportions” that runs the gamut from increased drug and alcohol addiction, increased domestic violence, suicide, and avoidance of medical care, among other concerns.

[Roger Kimball](#) admits in his May 23<sup>rd</sup> column that he “drastically underestimated how many people would die from the CCP Virus” but maintains nevertheless “the country has been on a moral bender, intoxicated by fear and panic.” The figures are inflated, because listing Covid-19 as the cause of death is financially profitable, and is used by the Left to harm Donald Trump. When the audience for the president’s performance at WH press conferences soared, the “Svengali-like Anthony Fauci, accompanied by his comely, Vanna White-like assistant Dr. Deborah Birx” hyped up alarming scenarios and predicted ghoulish death counts.

Kimball minimalizes the 100,000 deaths “attributed to the Wuhan flu,” claiming half came from nursing homes. [*in fact residents and caregivers of nursing homes account for 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the fatalities.*] and maximizes the dire consequences of the lockdowns: 30 million lost jobs, shuttered businesses, missed graduations, soaring suicide and drug-addiction rates. The real crisis was not the disease but the politician-and-media fired panic over the disease.

“But the symptoms this time will not be nausea and headache but shame at our credulousness and rage against those who exploited it. Rage. Look for it in a neighborhood near you in the coming weeks and polling stations across the country in November.”

Could he ever have imagined the rage that is flaming in the neighborhood near you today?

Honest debate

All of the issues raised above are subject to debate. No one has the last word on the novel coronavirus, the merits of hydroxychloroquine, the exact number of victims infected or deceased, or how they might have been saved... No one knows exactly why some countries have, apparently, achieved extraordinary results in containing the virus and why others succumbed to disaster. What was the best strategy? *Confinement*, lockdown, mitigation, masks, modeling ...

I lost two precious colleagues to Covid-19: Claude Barouch and Claude Goasguen. And I fear I have lost several more to collateral damage in this transatlantic divide, where bright minds turned away, petulantly, from an existential challenge, and chose tribal loyalty over reason and reality.

So much acrimony over lockdown when, as [Jonathan Kay](#) shows with graphic clarity, “the real lockdown was never imposed by government. It turns out that it was inside each and every one

of us all along.”

An abridged version was first published in