

Pandemic abandonment, panoramic displays and fascist propaganda: The month the earth stood still

Peter McLaren

To cite this article: Peter McLaren (2020): Pandemic abandonment, panoramic displays and fascist propaganda: The month the earth stood still, Educational Philosophy and Theory, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2020.1781787](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1781787)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1781787>



Published online: 07 Jul 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 359



View related articles [↗](#)

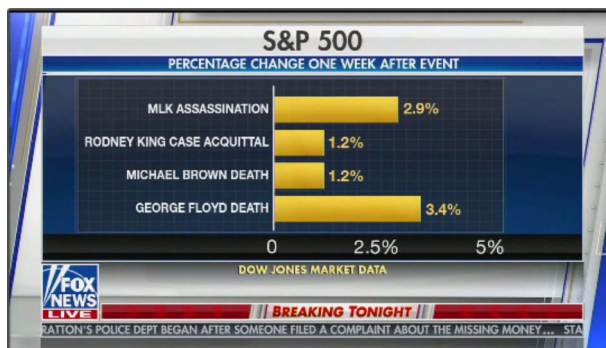


View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Pandemic abandonment, panoramic displays and fascist propaganda: The month the earth stood still

Biopowering up the down staircase

In early June, 2020, Fox News displayed for viewers a color-coded graph that compared the amounts that the stock market had risen in the aftermath of major racial tragedies, including the assassination of Martin Luther King, the beating of Rodney King and the death of Michael Brown, and the murder of George Floyd. Fox News was reminding its overwhelmingly white conservative viewers who support Donald Trump that the Dow Jones index isn't likely to suffer when black people are brutalized or murdered, or their victimizers acquitted (Chapman, 2020). Given the rise in white supremacist violence across the United States since the election of Trump in 2016, could the subliminal message be intentional: that killing black people is actually good for business?



Now, as citizens of the world's greatest superpower, with the most deadly military in history, and under the iron fist of the most heinous incarnation of the capitalist id, Donald Trump, we have arrived at an historical inflection point as the world's most influential anti-civilization. We have come to recognize more clearly than ever the extent to which we have been held hostage by a technocratic rationality of management and control leading to the most dire forms of political subjugation, lodged in the interstitial tissue of biopower (Foucault, 1978, 2008; Peters & Besley, 2020). Viewed through a biopolitical paradigm in which the original political relation is 'the ban' (the state of exception as zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exclusion and inclusion), the form that this has taken in the West is not that of the city but of the concentration camp (Agamben, 1998). Some will claim that the Covid-19 pandemic has enabled this state of exception to become normalized through government restrictions on human movement and a suspension of daily life (Agamben, 2020). (Agamben is wrong about his 'state of exception' theory with regard to the coronavirus, since the quarantines and restrictions of movement that have been put in place are more about saving lives than imposing biopolitical restrictions.) The pandemic has allowed governments to regulate populations using various models: the plague model, the smallpox model and the leprosy model (see Sarasin, 2020; Peters & Besley, 2020).

Whatever model of bio-surveillance is employed, their effects are always 'enfleshed' and work as hegemonic sealants, not only locking us permanently within Weber's iron cage but lowering the cage into a swamp of big lies and 'alternative facts'. Orwell's book, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, best reveals this teleological efficiency. Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia wage unceasing wars on each other. All that you need to do is to watch the telescreen and you'll be given the correct ideological coordinates by Big Brother. You must not only readjust your thoughts but your imagination. In Trump's universe, he has created the greatest economy in world history, successfully protected America from a global pandemic, kept unruly hordes of immigrants from our borders, withdrawn from international treaties and agreements with the 'globalists', and brought law and order to America's riotous streets. And he has saved the world from communist domination by withdrawing from the deeply corrupt and Chinese-controlled World Health Organization. He has made his world the world of approximately half the population of the country. Just watch Fox News for the correct ideological coordinates, filtered from the dank, disgruntled sewage that has accumulated in Donald Trump's brainpan.

While governing a country facing a global pandemic, a shattered economy, and widespread civil unrest over the death of George Floyd, Trump has shown little compassion for humanity and has chosen ego gratification over care and concern for his countrymen and in the process put the entire world in greater danger from Covid-19.

Covid-19: trumping up the stakes

It is undeniable that Trump willfully ignored the infectious disease specialists who had been warning countries that they need to prepare for new pandemics. For many Americans not addicted to Fox News, President Donald Trump and the war games he commandeers from inside the twitterverse is responsible for the deadly acceleration of Covid-19 fatalities as the virus spread throughout the US in its early stages. Clearly, Trump failed to communicate the seriousness of the threat posed by the coronavirus and continues to do so. In fact, Trump initially described the coronavirus as a 'hoax' designed to destroy his presidency. The calf splatter that exits his mouth with the power of a rocket thrust from his United States Space Force (the newly created space warfare service branch of the U.S. Armed Forces)—for instance, the potentially fatal idea that we should all ingest bleach as a cure for Covid-19—hasn't helped to make the country any safer from the pandemic, or from our own government.

The gross incompetence that has resulted from his whiplash presidency helmed by an uber narcissist in the wheelhouse of a mendacious propaganda machine has been responsible for thousands of deaths in the US and has most certainly exacerbated a pandemic-induced recession. Why would Trump want to read the reports of infectious disease specialists who have been warning the United States to prepare for a pandemic when that would mean spending billions of dollars just to prepare for a crisis that may not happen during his time in office? He's a real estate mogul after all, and didn't get there by being risk averse. Yet his missteps in handling the country afflicted by the largest number of coronavirus deaths worldwide are popping up like mushrooms under a cow pie.

The dictator and his spectacle

For a self-preening man-child who brags about being a 'stable genius' (as if he somehow had access to a Krell 'plastic educator' from the film, *Forbidden Planet*), who speaks about himself in the third person and even congratulates himself in his own tweets (Thank you President Trump!), who retweets himself and then agrees with himself by adding a 'so true' comment, who performs the presidency using coded race-baiting; who tried but failed to revive the death penalty so that the wrongly accused 'Central Park Five' could be executed, and who until

recently hunkered down in his bunker in the White House basement rather than address the nation about the vicious public lynching of George Floyd by a group of Minnesota policemen, and who invoked the Defense Production Act to compel minority workers to choose between possible death or unemployment while willfully ignoring the disproportionate Covid-19 deaths among minorities (and even offering immunity from prosecution for their corporate employers), is it any wonder that Generalissimo Trump, after declaring himself the ‘president of law and order’ during a Rose Garden address in which he threatened to end the George Floyd protests by sending in the military, orchestrated a Debordian spectacle that included Park Police and the National Guard assaulting peaceful protesters so he could walk over to St. John’s Church and have his photo-op with a Bible? This spectacle of brute military power included police on horseback, federal police firing pepper balls into the crowd and exploding stun grenades (‘flash bangs’) and police dressed like Robocop smashing through a crowd of peaceful protesters—and, without missing a beat, hammering a group of foreign journalists with the edge of their polycarbonate anti-riot shields—all of this occurring outside the White House grounds ahead of Trump’s prideful walk across Lafayette Square, an iconic historical moment that stinks of infamy. Seemingly untroubled by his bone spurs, he strolled effortlessly with his cadre of sycophants to nearby St. John’s Church (which has received some fire damage) to engineer some red meat for his base, this time in the form of a photo opportunity. Ivanka was holding in her \$1,540 Max Mara handbag a Bible, which she handed over to her father. In true game show style, Trump brandished it like a wild west snake oil salesman, hoisting it over his shoulder as if it were some kind of battle trophy. While seemingly a religious gesture, it came across as more of a salute to the Moloch of authoritarianism, the Nazi Gestapo and the Stalinist NKVD, a break from his usual amped-up carnival barker argot of those who try to sell you a Rolex watch from the inside pockets of their raincoat. Behind this gesture, it was not difficult to see the image of Paula White, Trump’s personal pastor who spouts gibberish disguised as ‘speaking in tongues’, appearing on a silver cloud and famously repeating her call for ‘all satanic pregnancies to miscarry’. Pence and Pompeo could be seen flanking both sides of White, as Christian Zionist cherubim figures, proclaiming the revelation (accepted by most Christian evangelicals) that the fall of Israel will herald the second coming of Jesus, and banish all Jews to hell unless they accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. The 82nd Airborne parachute force was later deployed to make sure there was no need for Trump to retreat once more to his White House bunker. Trump’s Defense Secretary Mark Esper used the phrase ‘dominate the battle space’ in his instructions to state officials for handling the protesters—which included the convenient post-communist adversary, Antifa—and it looked as if the game was afoot, until it wasn’t. Later, Esper broke with Trump on the idea of using active military units on the streets of the US, except in the case of extreme emergency, and then he ended up deferring to Trump, like an obedient court jester. Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany made a ludicrous comparison of Trump’s Bible hoisting photo-opportunity to Churchill’s visits to bomb-damaged neighborhoods during the World War II Blitz: ‘Like Churchill—we saw him inspecting the bombing damage and it sent a very powerful message of leadership to the British people’ (D’Antonio, 2020). Such a description constituted a de facto designation of the protesters as the enemy, as Nazis. This was far from a Churchillian moment, more like one in which brainworms finally took over Trump’s entire neocortex. The Attack at Lafayette Square will serve as a defining moment of the Trump presidency—agreed—but not for the reasons McEnany describes. It was a farcical display redolent of former Eastern Bloc tin-pot-dictators. What drove this brazen carnivalesque panorama of toxic machismo was, in part, the embarrassing coverage that the Chosen One had received several days earlier of being cast as a ‘bunker boy’, a coward forced to huddle inside an underground bunker stocked with cheeseburgers and toilet paper while the White House was besieged by protesters armed with firecrackers. Trump was ensepulchered there with his assemblage of quislings with their ‘high and tight fade’ hairstyles, reflective Ray-Bans and communication earpieces while protesters in sweatpants and t-shirts were marching for justice all over the country. In New York, recordings

from police scanners revealed orders to ‘run them over’ and ‘shoot the motherfuckers’. It’s not surprising that in Philadelphia, police served as the guardians for one of the most repugnant symbols of white supremacy when they gathered to protect the statue of the notoriously racist mayor and police commissioner from the 1970s, Frank Rizzo.

Each time Trump exercises his twitter messaging he convenes an American Falangist Neo-Confederate Thugocracy. We know a great deal about Trump’s malignant narcissism, his penchant for congratulating himself, his lack of empathy for the suffering of others, his extreme lying and his denial that he made certain statements even when there is ample video evidence that he did. But there is something more to Trump’s character than many have not recognized. Marxist philosopher Peter Hudis gives us an important insight into Trump’s character by way of a social phenomenon that is of profound social significance—misanthropy. A misanthrope is pessimistic but is more than a pessimist. A misanthrope is someone who hates humanity to the core, who lacks inter-personal trust, who feels besieged by others who are trying to take advantage of him, who suffers from a negative and social atomism, who lacks a faith in human nature, and who believes that people in general are untrustworthy and unfair. As Hudis notes, a misanthrope like Trump loves profit and capital—dead labor—over living labor—people (cited in Doğan, 2020). This is indeed the ultimate expression of the hatred of humanity. Hudis (cited in Doğan 2020) also notes that misanthropy usually has a companion, and that companion is misology, the hatred of reason, which emerged from the counter-enlightenment. The most prominent expression of misology is fascism. This, combined with the rampant anti-intellectualism in the US, makes for a pathological society filled with excremental reason and conspiracy theories such as QAnon. Many QAnon followers worship Trump as a Jesus figure who is waging a secret battle against a group of pedophile elites in Washington. The person known only as ‘Q’ has prophesied that America will soon face ‘The Storm’ when Trump will order the mass execution of Washington figures responsible for creating a worldwide child sex ring. Many QAnon followers believe that the Rothschild family is behind Princess Diana’s death and that Angela Merkel is Adolf Hitler’s grandchild. Some believe that Washington elites harvest the adrenal glands from the brains of children and sacrifice them to the ancient God Moloch (Nguyen, 2020). Others profess that Trump can exist on an interdimensional plane where he has already arrested the pedophiles. And, shockingly, QAnon followers are winning congressional primaries and will soon be walking through the hallowed halls of Congress.

Racist and reactionary television host, Tucker Carlson of Fox News, argued that the Black Lives Matter movement was trying to eliminate the police and put an armed ‘woke militia’ in place in order to help the liberal Democrats shut down free speech, seize power and create partisan law enforcement, and warned Fox viewers that they will ‘come for you’ (Graziosi, 2020).

This clearly reflects one of the narratives of the Confederate myth of the Lost Cause, a narrative that tried to convince Northern whites that African Americans were a threat to the entire white race, and that gave rise to the Ku Klux Klan, Jim Crow laws, and racialized systems of oppression affecting Black people right up to the present, including the prison industrial system and school-to-prison pipeline.

The most dangerous man on the planet

The tragedy of this pandemic should not distract us from other actions taken by the Trump administration that are as comparably dangerous. Renowned linguist Noam Chomsky, arguably the most important critic of US foreign policy over the past half century, famously proclaimed that the modern Republican Party is ‘the most dangerous organization’ in human history. Chomsky points out that in a recent government report, Trump’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration predicted that the planet would warm by 7 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century and yet has shockingly decided to do nothing in response. The assumption of this group

is that automotive emissions will eventually pale in comparison to the damage inflicted by climate change so we might as well allow these emissions to expand unhindered, regardless of their deadly consequences to human health and well-being (Chomsky, cited in Johnson, 2018). When stupidity and a lack of human empathy and decency mix with mad-dog misanthropy, the results are predictably combustible. Chomsky's evidentiary claims supporting his assertion reflect an unimpeachable intellectual pedigree and have become the gold standard among the left for challenging US military activities. Let us recount just a few reasons why Chomsky's appraisal of the Republican Party appears demonstrably accurate. The most recent global pact with its European allies that the Trump administration has grievously forsaken is the Open Skies treaty, a reactive political move that has egregiously enfeebled the foundational architecture of international arms control. Initially proposed by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1955, the Open Skies treaty allows 35 nations, including Russia, to conduct unarmed surveillance flights over each other's territory in order to ascertain whether or not nations are making ready military action. This most recent action by the Trump administration likely portends a departure from the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or New START, that restricts the number of deployed nuclear missiles in U.S. and Russian arsenals to 1,550. In 2019, Trump withdrew the United States from the INF Treaty with Russia (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) signed in 1987 by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev which prohibited the development and deployment of ground-launched nuclear missiles with ranges of 310 miles to 3,420 miles. These short-range missiles deployed in Western Europe and Russia have a very short flight-time to Moscow and pose a decapitation threat in the form of an instantaneous attack that would eliminate any possibility of a response. For thirty years the agreement eliminated nuclear-tipped cruise missiles off the European continent. In 2018, Trump withdrew from JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) brokered by the Obama administration that lifted sanctions on Iran. Trump went ahead with the withdrawal even though Iran had accepted limits on its nuclear program and allowed international inspectors into its facilities. Trump pulled out of the Paris Agreement (designed to curb the use of fossil fuels), the Trans-Pacific Partnership and KORUS (the south Korean trade deal). He has renegotiated NAFTA, wants to include Russia in the G7, has signed the Singapore Agreement and has pulled out of the Human Rights Council. And he has even extricated the United States from UNESCO (the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization). Most recently, at this fulcrum historical moment in the US, Trump withdrew from the World Health Organization. Trump's embittered exit from this organization has raised an alarm among many countries worldwide, as it signals a further weakening of international relations provoked by another attempt at grandstanding on the part of Trump. Recently Trump's piratical political operatives attempted to get controlling access to the Covid-19 vaccine by bribing a German biopharmaceutical company—the Tübingen-based CureVac company—to move its research wing to the United States and to develop a vaccine exclusively for U.S. citizens (Hernandez-Morales, 2020).

The worldwide post-pandemic capitalist paradigm that is shifting into view reflects Frankenstein-styled digitalization effects and the rise of platforms that are enveloping the entire global economy, heightening the concentration of capital worldwide, worsening social inequality and deepening the reach of the global police state by means of fourth industrial revolution technologies (Robinson, 2020). A new globally integrated production and financial system has been enabled by 'artificial intelligence (AI) and the collection, processing and analysis of immense amounts of data ("big data")' (Robinson, 2020). Technologies that are now becoming prominent 'include machine learning, automation and robotics, nano- and biotechnology, the Internet of Things (IoT), quantum and cloud computing, 3D printing, new forms of energy storage and autonomous vehicles, among others' (Robinson, 2020).

This acceleration of digital restructuring has resulted in 'a vast expansion of reduced-labor or laborless digital services, including all sorts of new telework arrangements, drone delivery, cash-free commerce, digitized finance (or fintech), tracking and other forms of surveillance, automated

medical and legal services, and remote teaching involving pre-recorded instruction' (Robinson, 2020). This vastly intensifies the 'military-industrial-security complex' and expands capital's organic composition. Robinson (2020) notes that 'digitalization vastly increases what radical political economists, following Marx, refer to as the organic composition of capital, meaning that the portion of fixed capital in the form of machinery and technology tends to increase relative to variable capital in the form of labor'. Of course this accelerates the replacement of living labor by digitalized machinery—dead robots.

The turn to fascism: implications for world health

Clearly the implications for withdrawing from the WHO are all the more dire when the President of the United States is a barking mad proto-fascist—some call him the American Führer—performing the Hollywood ideal of how a strongman should behave. You can be sure that money allotted to fight the pandemic will be generously doled out to defense contractors. In fact, as Trump withdraws from the WHO, the Pentagon is gearing up to deploy the artificial intelligence unit Project Maven, which analyzes drone footage instantaneously to create an algorithm-based surveillance system to track the pandemic's spread around the world. As busloads of U.S. troops pour into D.C. and take up strategic positions, more than 300 veterans have signed onto an open letter urging troops to 'do the right thing' and refuse orders to deploy against their own citizens who have a constitutional right to assemble and protest.

The World Health Organization debacle

The Trump administration has seriously undercut global efforts to contain the coronavirus and to develop a vaccine for Covid-19 by withdrawing from the WHO. Trump's electoral base, who tend to be anti-globalist, generally don't like international institutions and the idea of partnering with other countries (except in times of war when the US needs military allies). Furthermore, they are often made vulnerable to conspiracy theorists who maintain there is a secret international cabal operating to create a one world government headed by liberal financial titans such as George Soros. There remains little love lost among Trump's base when it comes to withdrawing from the World Health Organization, despite the advantages of global interoperability and connectivity among nation states in helping identify and curtail various infectious diseases before they spread global havoc. Before withdrawing support from the WHO, Trump flouted international trading rules when a shipment of FFP2 masks, which were ordered by Berlin's police force, were diverted to the US (since the US firm that makes the masks, 3M, was prohibited from exporting any of its medical appliances to other countries). Trump invoked a Korean-War-era law to stop the sale, and took cover behind the Defense Production Act, stipulating that US firms must provide more medical supplies to the US public. This 'America First' move was a prelude to what was to follow. Withdrawing from the WHO was a way to create a secondary scapegoat for the way that Trump bungled his handling of the pandemic: if blaming China's Wuhan laboratory didn't take hold among the American public, then Trump could use the WHO as his fallback target, with the ultimate purpose of deflecting attention away from his gross mishandling of his administration's response to the pandemic.

Trump's withdrawal from the WHO (the US became a member as part of a joint resolution in 1948) is as much a gesture of authoritarianism as it is a strategic measure to pressure the WHO to resist the political influence of China, whose President, Xi Jinping, has pledged \$2 billion over two years to fight the coronavirus pandemic (Associated Press, 2020). What should we make of a reality television impresario with fantasies of being a powerful dictator, who has been handed the most powerful office in the world, and is backed by the most powerful military in human history? In this instance, in his withdrawal from the WHO, and his desire to be seen as a strongman,

he is willing to sacrifice lives—non-American lives, presumably from what he has referred to as ‘shithole countries’—that might otherwise be saved by the global reach of the WHO in fighting the pandemic.

Masha Gessen (2020) is worth quoting at length:

Donald Trump thinks power looks like masked men in combat uniforms lined up in front of the marble columns of the Lincoln Memorial. He thinks it looks like Black Hawk helicopters hovering so low over protesters that they chop off the tops of trees. He thinks it looks like troops using tear gas to clear a plaza for a photo op. He thinks it looks like him hoisting a Bible in his raised right hand. Trump thinks power sounds like this: ‘Our country always wins. That is why I am taking immediate Presidential action to stop the violence and restore security and safety in America ... dominate the streets ... establish an overwhelming law-enforcement presence... . If a city or state refuses ... I will deploy the United States military and quickly solve the problem for them... . We are putting everybody on warning... . One law and order and that is what it is. One law—we have one beautiful law.’ To Trump, power sounds like the word ‘dominate,’ repeated over and over on a leaked call with governors. It sounds like the silence of the men in uniform when they are asked who they are.... Much as he played a real-estate tycoon in the most crude and reductive way, Trump is now performing his idea of power as he imagines it. In his intuition, power is autocratic; it affirms the superiority of one nation and one race; it asserts total domination; and it mercilessly suppresses all opposition. Whether or not he is capable of grasping the concept, Trump is performing fascism.

Is it any wonder that when reporting on the George Floyd protests, the Trump administration focuses mainly on the looting that took place. The looting of stores has become the focus of much of the media coverage of the rebellion. Yet, as Joshua Frank (2020) notes,

The looting of stores is inherently a class issue, whether you look upon it favorably or not (there are always exceptions of course). The act of looting is a long-standing American tradition, dating back to the theft of Native lands and African enslavement. And today, while wealthy people don’t loot strip malls, they are adept at looting natural resources and labor, from the coalfields of West Virginia to Jeff Bezo’s Amazon warehouses. The poor, exerting their nominal power—even in a destructive and violent manner—display an entirely natural reaction to a continually powerless state of being. For them, looting is a cry for help, an expression of hopelessness.

Richard Wolff (2020) reveals that to help the economy get through the ‘pre-virus’ economic crisis, government treasuries borrowed vast sums as monetary authorities created money and lent it at extremely low interest rates to the major corporations and especially big banks. When for years low interest rates had enabled corporations and governments to borrow limitlessly at almost zero interest rate cost, and to allow central banks to pump this new money into economies, inequalities of income and wealth spiraled, and the dot.com meltdown of 2000 and the sub-prime meltdown of 2008/9 forced the economy to accumulate vulnerabilities that precipitated a crash. The trigger for the present economic crisis is a virus. The US has not learned an important lesson from SARS, MERS and Ebola—that society needs to stockpile tests, masks, ventilators, hospital beds and have enough trained personnel to manage a pandemic. But these are commodities that are not profitable to stockpile. Yes, this is expensive but it’s cost effective when compared to the devastation that occurs if a pandemic actually hits. And yet, the pivot point of the captains of industry is to ignore the stockpiles and revive the same system that created the problems in the first place. But why revive an economic system prone to the same economic vulnerabilities? Because the capitalist class is by and large interested in short term profits. It’s grab the money and run. Wolff (2020) believes socialism is a far more effective system in times of crises because it does not follow a profit-first imperative and puts social needs ahead of profits:

A worker-coop based economy—where workers democratically run enterprises, deciding what, how and where to produce, and what to do with any profits—could, and likely would, put social needs and goals (like proper preparation for pandemics) ahead of profits. Workers are the majority in all capitalist societies; their interests are those of the majority. Employers are always a small minority; theirs are the ‘special interests’ of that minority. Capitalism gives that minority the position, profits and power to determine how the society as a whole lives or dies. That’s why all employees now wonder and worry about how long our

jobs, incomes, homes and bank accounts will last—if we still have them. A minority (employers) decides all those questions and excludes the majority (employees) from making those decisions, even though that majority must live with their results.

The WHO and the collapse of internationalism

The United States represents about 15% of the WHO budget. The US currently ‘provides 27% of the WHO’s budget for polio eradication; 19% of its budget for tackling tuberculosis, HIV, malaria and vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles; and 23% of its budget for emergency health operations’ (Maxmen, 2020). Withdrawal from the WHO could contribute to considerable suffering and death if US funds suddenly disappear.

According to Alice Miranda Ollstein (2020), the U.S. contributes more than any other country to the WHO, at more than \$400 million per year, and this money enables the organization to conduct vaccine trials, distribute test kits and to provide reliable scientific data to governments. Trump has accused the organization of a major cover up concerning China’s responsibility for spreading the coronavirus. And while Trump did impose travel restrictions on China when the coronavirus first hit the US mainland, he famously failed to take advantage of this window of opportunity to increase diagnostic testing. Trump even downplayed the seriousness of the virus in late January, referring to it as a ‘hoax’ or no worse than the seasonal flu. Trump later hailed China’s early response to the pandemic, yet failed to declare a national emergency until mid-March. By withdrawing from the WHO, Trump is ignoring the advice contained in his own administration’s 2017 pandemic preparedness plan which supports an ‘expanded international coordination on pandemic preparedness and response’ and specifically calls for ‘continued support’ for the WHO (Ollstein, 2020). Trump had asked Congress to cut the budget for the WHO by half before the pandemic was declared, since this was part of Trump’s overall policy of delinking from international bodies that do not fully support Trump’s interests. Viewing the WHO as pandering to China, some Republican lawmakers have called for WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus’s to resign. They have accused the WHO of assuming a deferential posture with the Chinese government, which led to the WHO to remain indecisive in response to earlier alarms that were raised over the outbreak. Trump is using Cold War rhetoric to amplify the attacks by Republican lawmakers against the WHO, an organization which they perceive has been overly deferential towards China, with some lawmakers even claiming the WHO’s leniency towards China is proof positive that it now functions as little more than a propaganda arm of the Chinese Communist Party (Ollstein, 2020). Richard Horton, editor of *The Lancet* medical journal, protested Trump’s policy as ‘madness and terrifying both at the same time’(Aljazeera, 2020). All over Latin America the virus is spreading, with one of the most dangerous hot spots being Brasil, where President Bolsonaro, ‘the Trump of the Tropics’ is downplaying the seriousness of the pandemic and is also threatening to exit the WHO.

Does Trump seriously believe that the US can defeat a global pandemic on its own? Without attempting to protect its neighbors? A thought that should make all the world shudder.

Amy Maxmen (2020) reports that repercussions of the US withdrawal from the WHO could involve ‘a resurgence of polio and malaria, to barriers in the flow of information on COVID-19.’ She also writes that ‘[s]cientific partnerships around the world would also be damaged, and the United States could lose influence over global health initiatives, including those to distribute drugs and vaccines for the new coronavirus as they become available.’ US-led initiatives for fighting the pandemic ‘might even add incoherence to the world’s response to COVID-19, and global health more generally, if they’re not connected to a fully-funded WHO.’ David Heymann, an epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, maintains that gains won through vaccination campaigns that cost hundreds of millions of dollars would be

lost, if the US withdraws funding from the WHO (Maxmen, 2020). Maxmen (2020) warns that lack of international collaboration on health issues would be disastrous for the entire world. She writes:

A rift between the WHO and researchers at US agencies could also weaken long-standing collaborations. Scientists from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institutes of Health often rotate through the WHO's headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Around 180 epidemiologists, health-policy specialists and other staff members at the WHO are from the United States, and dozens of other Americans work at the organization as visiting scholars and interns. Most of their jobs aren't directly tied to US funding, but they could be affected as the relationship between the United States and the WHO is strained, says Lee. There could also be impacts on about 80 official WHO collaborating centres in the United States.

Rebecca Katz, director of the Center for Global Health Science and Security at Georgetown University in Washington DC., best sums up the US proposal: 'In this pandemic, people have said we're building the plane while flying, This proposal is like removing the windows while the plane is mid-air' (Maxmen, 2020).

Disaster politics and the end of the future

Trump's Disaster Politics has impacted every area of life in the United States. Noam Chomsky has often said that in electoral politics, you don't vote for somebody, you vote against somebody. That means voting intelligently, and that would be for the person most likely to defeat Trump in a general election, assuming that candidate would wreak less havoc on the democratic institutions that in the US are currently on life support. At the same time it means building social movements to demand socialist alternatives to the neoliberal disaster that has befallen us. In the meantime, the telehealth industry continues to expand, with an eye to making healthcare a more integrated ecosystem based on data analytics (utilizing health sensors, wearable technology and health apps), and it is our responsibility to make sure it does not become seamless with the biopolitical expansion of the authoritarian surveillance state. And much of this will depend on changes to the way our generations to come will be educated. According to Katie Ferrari (2020), the CEO of K12 Inc., one of the largest for-profit online schools in the United States, has communicated to investors about the 'upside of the pandemic on our business.' She reports that the company has joined the National Coronavirus Recovery Commission sponsored by the rightwing Heritage Foundation that 'promotes free-market solutions including expanded virtual learning.' She also warns that the biometric data collected by platforms such as Google Hangouts, 'will be weaponized against students of color.'

Education will play a role in terms of what kind of 'immune-state' is forged out of the debris of the coronavirus pandemic and George Floyd uprising (see Peters & Besley, 2020). Will it be a socialist state model that acts quickly to provide social and geopolitical isolation of neighborhoods or a business-technological model that often flouts scientific-medical advice?

To face these challenges and others we can assume some of the insights and initiatives proposed by Mike Neary (2020). According to Neary (2020), following communist science and through the development of a 'revolutionary epistemology', 'universities can be organised around the democratic common ownership of the means of socially useful production of knowledge and exchange, with a curriculum based not around complexity and interdisciplinarity but on the unity of the natural and social sciences, articulated, aestheticized and politicised through literature and the arts.' These ideas can benefit teacher education programs throughout the country and help recharge critical pedagogy in the wake of the pandemic. We must not lose sight of the horizon beyond capitalism. There is much work to be done, and whether this pandemic will leave the world more prone to fascism or more ripe for a socialist alternative is up to us.

References

- Agamben, G. (2020). The invention of an epidemic. <https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-l-invenzione-di-un-epidemia>.
- Agamben, H. S. (1998). *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life* (Daniel Heller-Roazen, Trans.). Stanford University Press.
- Aljazeera. (2020, May 30). Backlash against Trump exiting WHO as virus grips Latin America. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/backlash-trump-exiting-virus-grips-latin-america-200530190431765.html>
- Associated Press. (2020, May 18). *Politico*. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/18/china-announces-2-billion-in-virus-help-at-who-assembly-264939>
- Chapman, M. (2020, June 5). Fox News triggers outrage with graphic comparing how much stocks have risen after racist tragedies. *RawStory*. https://www.rawstory.com/2020/06/fox-news-triggers-outrage-with-graphic-comparing-how-much-stocks-have-risen-after-racist-tragedies/?utm_source=push_notifications
- D'Antonio, M. (2020, June 4). Trump's ludicrous photo-op episode was no Churchill moment. *CNN News*. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/03/opinions/trumps-photo-op-not-churchillian-dantonio/index.html>
- Doğan, Sevgi. (2020). Interview with Peter Hudis. *The International Marxist-Humanist*. May 30. <https://imhojournal.org/articles/covid-19-the-anti-racist-movement-and-the-search-for-a-socialist-alternative-an-interview-with-peter-hudis/>
- Ferrari, K. (2020, May 14). Disaster Capitalism is Coming for Public Education. *Jacobin*. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/05/public-education-schools-covid-coronavirus-charter-teachers>
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. Allen Lane.
- Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics*. Lectures at the College de France, 1978–1979 (Arnold Davidson, Ed.; Graham Burcell, Trans.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Frank, J. (2020, June 1). It's a class war now too. *CounterPunch*. <https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/06/01/its-a-class-war-now-too/>
- Gessen, M. (2020, June 3). Donald Trump's Fascist Performance. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/donald-trumps-fascist-performance>
- Graziosi, G. (2020, June 9). Dangerous racist: Tucker carlson lambasted for saying BLM movement and democrats were "Coming for You" with "Woke Militia". *Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/tucker-carlson-twitter-blm-democrats-militia-police-black-lives-matter-a9557251.html>
- Hernandez-Morales, A. (2020, March 19). Germany confirms that Trump tried to buy firm working on coronavirus vaccine. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-confirms-that-donald-trump-tried-to-buy-firm-working-on-coronavirus-vaccine/>
- Johnson, S., & Chomsky, N. (2018, November 5). Noam Chomsky says Trump and associates are 'criminally insane'. *Big Think*. <https://bigthink.com/politics-current-affairs/chomsky-says-trump-is-criminally-insane>
- Maxmen, A. (2020, May 27). What a US exit from the WHO means for COVID-19 and global health. *Nature*. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01586-0?proof=trueIn> <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-01586-0>
- Neary, M. (2020, May 30). Odyssean education plays the coronavirus: ideation and the immune institution. *Postdigital Science and Education*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42438-020-00136-1>
- Nguyen, T. (2020, June 13). QAnon marches towards the halls of Congress. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/13/qanon-congress-316289>
- Ollstein, A. M. (2020, April 14). *Politico*. Trump halts funding to World Health Organization. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/14/trump-world-health-organization-funding-186786>
- Peters, M. A., Besley, T. (2020). Biopolitics, conspiracy and the immuno-state: an evolving global politico-genetic complex. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00131857.2020.1772026>
- Robinson, William. (2020, June 17). Post-COVID economy may have more robots, fewer jobs and intensified surveillance. *Truthout*. <https://truthout.org/articles/post-covid-economy-may-have-more-robots-fewer-jobs-and-intensified-surveillance/>
- Sarasin, P. (2020, March 31). Understanding the coronavirus pandemic with foucault? FoucaultBlog. <https://www.fsw.uzh.ch/foucaultblog/essays/254/understanding-corona-with-foucault>
- Wolff, R. (2020, April 6). Covid-19 and the failures of capitalism. *CounterPunch*. <https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/04/06/covid-19-and-the-failures-of-capitalism/>

Peter McLaren

Attallah College of Educational Studies, Chapman University, Orange, CA, USA

 peter.mclaren1@gmail.com