

THE ORIGINAL DISEASE

by Wajahat Ali

Lockdowns can't save us from the plague. Social distancing can't outrun bullets, bombs, votes or money. None of this can protect us from the virus that has fueled and consumed American society since its alleged founding. Sure, it will help flatten and hopefully suppress the curve for coronavirus, which has currently killed over 100,000 Americans. But, the original disease of the land of the free will still remain after the vaccine. It rules these parts. Its empire has roots. Its bloodline remains flowing. Its tentacles surf across the world thanks to the internet.

It has ensured that the virus has flattened us, but it has not flattened us equally.

White Supremacy still reigns. If anything, coronavirus has exposed America and given us a clear look at ourselves for all our beauty and ugliness. The virus has devastated black and brown communities the most, those workers who are allegedly "essential" until they have fulfilled their purpose.

Here, the world's most powerful country doesn't have enough tests for frontline workers and marginalized communities, but celebrities and politicians get tested overnight. Families are lining up around the block for bags of food, while the dead are being put on the street in body bags. President Trump enjoys a round of golf on his private properties, meanwhile black men can't even jog without fear of being killed by a lynch mob.

As frontline workers are risking their lives trying to protect Americans, alleged patriots are celebrating their freedom by getting drunk at lake parties in the Ozarks and bringing assault rifles to state houses. They won't wear masks for protection because they're not sheep but they need an AK-47 to buy eggs at the grocery store.

America was once envied, but now is pitied around the world. The nation of promise has become the nation of incompetence, a nation lacking - in tests, resources, supplies, and compassion. But for the rest of us, who always had to be exceptional to be considered a "real American," we always knew this. We experienced the undercurrent of cruelty that animates a large part of America's existence.

But the story doesn't have to end like this. Sometimes, things must become worse until people wake up and see the rot that it was in front of their eyes and decide to embark on radical change. Other times, things become worse - and worse. This is a pivotal moment for this country to first acknowledge and identify the many sins that have existed within her land and exported to countries abroad, starting first and foremost with White supremacy. The systems that have been propped up to keep this leviathan fed must be reformed or else this pain will persist. In the absence of reform, which looks like affordable health care, free and fair elections, economic opportunities, a living wage, decarceration, and regulations and plans to decrease income inequality, this plague, this virus, will continue even after a vaccine is discovered for coronavirus.

If we don't change, then we won't be able to blame Wuhan, China, or wet markets or conspiracy theories. In the end, we will be held responsible for spreading the virus that destroyed this country

