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## ***I Warned About Trump's Attacks on Science, But Didn't Predict the Horror That Lay Ahead***

“¡Abajo la inteligencia! ¡Viva la muerte!”

Those infamous words – “Down with intelligence! Long live death!” – were pronounced in 1936 by General Millán Astray, a fascist general who was a mentor and friend of Francisco Franco, soon to be Spain’s dictator for over four decades. They were part of a ranting speech Millán delivered at the University of Salamanca celebrating the insurrection against the Spanish Republic that heralded the dark years that were on the horizon.

I recalled these barbarous words with trepidation back in October of 2017 when I began tracking down the ways in which Donald Trump, in only the first 10 endless months of what was already then his endless government, was waging a disquieting war on science and the truth. In an [online essay](#) for the New York Review of Books, I warned of the “lethal consequences” that this offensive would entail, the millions of lives that would be shortened.

At that point what worried me was his assault on environmental and labor laws, the ways in which he was draining every government department of experts, the reckless evisceration of advisory councils, the proposed budgetary cuts to scientific research, the attacks on vaccinations and the health system and medical knowhow behind it, his obtuse climate change denials.

Observers have focused on his botched actions and confusing inactions, the Niagara of misinformation that spews daily from his mouth. It has been revealed that there were

more than enough warnings, memos and red flags by January of this year to warrant urgent preparations that were never put in place and, scandalously, that Trump's oblivious and careless acolytes dismantled in early 2018 the team in charge of handling precisely this sort of disastrous disease, firing its most experienced members. The latest scene in this tragic farce of capriciousness is Trump's insistent demand that hydroxychloroquine be used to combat Covid-19. Despite this anti-malarial remedy not having been tested with objective standards nor its side-effects sufficiently vetted, he treats it as a miracle drug, harking back, perhaps, to when he announced that "one day – it's like a miracle – [the virus] will disappear". Magical thinking is to be expected in religion, literature and among audiences at shows where conjurers pull rabbits out of hats, but not as a substitute for professional medicine and settled science.

"What do you have to lose?" Trump recently reiterated at one of his interminable press conferences.

Some answers: raising false hope? Wasted resources and time? Lives lost?

These critiques of his behavior, however valid, should not let us lose sight of something more fundamental that is going on. Today's chaotic and bumbling response to this emergency is no accident, but deeply rooted and systemic, the direct result of a pattern of callow benightedness that verges on the criminal and that goes back to the very start of Trump's regime, embedded in the very recalcitrant anti-intellectual DNA of this president and his followers.

If, back in October of 2017, Trump seemed a remote, albeit inadvertent, disciple of the fascist general who shouted "Long live death!" all those decades ago as democracy was being destroyed in Spain, today I see him as someone far more terrifying: the personification of one of the horsemen of the apocalypse, the one riding the white horse of pestilence.

And yet, even if the ship of state is in the hands of a lunatic that makes Ahab look sane, there is cause for hope.

The very science that Trump has derided and loves to ignore has slowly been prevailing, advancing as all research does, step by rigorous and measured step, until containment, immunization, the wisdom of epidemiology will prevail. We must hold fast to the belief that the grace of our reason and the light of our knowledge, as well as the constancy of our solidarity with one another, will help us to find a way out of our current crisis.

Of course, when we emerge from this catastrophe, you can be sure that Trump will claim credit and boast about how his genius and foresight saved the United States and, why not, all of ungrateful humanity as well.

This will undoubtedly be known as the year of a plague that changed everything. It remains to be seen if it will also go down in history as the year when the enabler of death in the White House was finally held accountable by the American people. It remains to be seen if enough of them have developed the antibodies that will stem the epidemic of his ignorant reign.

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