

# Will We Learn COVID-19's Most Important Lesson?

On February 29th, US Surgeon General Jerome Adams took to Twitter to admonish Americans: "Seriously people — STOP BUYING MASKS! They are NOT effective in preventing general public from catching #Coronavirus ..."

A little over a month later, Adams finally got around to asking the Centers for Disease Control if perhaps he'd been talking through his hat when talking through a mask might have been smarter.

City governments from Miami to Los Angeles gave themselves whiplash as mask-wearing went from "officially discouraged" to "mandatory" virtually overnight. Philadelphia's city bus system adopted the new policy so enthusiastically that masked cops were summoned to violently drag non-masked riders off of buses.

The Parable of Mask Idiocy's lessons extend, like those of most parables, far beyond the specifics of the story itself.

If general lessons can be drawn from our experience of COVID-19 so far, here are three of them:

First, never expect government to be prepared to respond to a pandemic.

Second, never expect government's ad hoc responses to a pandemic to be the correct responses.

And third, never expect government to admit its errors.

The sequel to the Parable of Mask Idiocy is the "Saved You From Apocalypse" Claim.

You've heard that story in its mocking primitive form before:

Villagers cower in fear as the sun begins to disappear behind a black spot. It's the end of the world, their witch doctor informs them. Follow my instructions to appease the gods or you will all be consumed! Then the eclipse ends and the witch doctor takes credit. The world WOULD have ended if it hadn't been for him and his wisdom, see?

At this very moment, herds of government officials and "public health" bureaucrats are stampeding away from their initial predictions of hundreds of thousands, even millions, of American deaths from COVID-19. Latest guesstimate: "Substantially under" 100,000.

They know you won't forget those early predictions, so their task is to con you into believing that the lower numbers are a function of you having obeyed their orders.

One problem with that is that so far the death tolls seem to be worst in areas where draconian orders were most strictly enforced. And that seems to be true globally, not just in the US (see the responses and outcomes in Italy versus South Korea, for example).

While there are certainly other factors involved — population density being a big one — it's at least plausible that the authoritarian responses of governors like New York's Andrew Cuomo and New Jersey's Phil Murphy increased, rather than decreased, the death tolls in their states.

As with so many other jobs, the state is neither competent nor trustworthy when it comes to protecting us from contagion. Let's never again forget that.