

Social Justice Project
March 14, 2021
Linda Harris

In Memoriam to the 553,917 U.S. Citizens and Residents Who Did Not Have to Die from COVID-19

My Introduction to COVID-19

About 5 years ago, because of my health problems, I started doing genetic research. This turned me into a medical sleuth, and I began looking into health issues for family and friends. In January 2020, I found an epidemiologist, Dr. Michael Osterholm, who wrote clear medical summaries, and I then watched his podcast interview about COVID-19 with Joe Rogan. This was the first time I had heard an in-depth discussion about this virus. Osterholm explained that COVID-19's genetic architecture is most similar to SARS and MERS and therefore is highly contagious. He said, that SARS and MERS viruses are transmitted by people inhaling, exhaled-air of people who have been infected, and it is those airborne aerosols that carry the virus. He said this is why it is so important to wear a facial mask. I started wearing one immediately!



By early March 2020, U.S. hospital staffs were wearing masks, even though Dr. Fauci, President Trump's medical advisor, said it was not necessary. My dermatologist, who is Chinese, was talking with her colleagues in China and South Korea. Her comments about those discussions motivated me to read what Asian countries were doing to stop COVID-19. I was deeply impressed that China(1) and South Korea were so scientifically serious. A South Korean health official explained that MERS virus outbreak in 2015 resulted in 186 cases and 38 deaths, and from this they gained an understanding that the exponential, or accelerating growth threat, had to be controlled. "We can't ever forget the incident. It is engraved in our mind," the Korean CDC's Lee Sang-won said. "We were hurt so much, and we felt remorseful."(2) I was struck by the integrity of Sang-won's words, and by his sense of responsibility to protect lives.

By mid-January 2020, both China and South Korea had implemented an approach of wearing masks, practicing hygiene and social distancing combined with massive testing, tracing, isolating, lockdowns, and treating. These governments had centralized health systems, invested the necessary funds, and hired tens of thousands of healthcare workers to carry out early control through intensive manual contact tracing. They calculated that these protocols would stomp out COVID-19 before it accelerated through their populations.(3) The approach was replicated in Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and New Zealand.(4) The U.S. media gave almost no coverage to the immediate success of Asia's superior pandemic response. When they did write about it, they would usually add dismissive cold war or anti-communist comments like, 'this approach would only work under authoritarian governments, it could never happen in the U.S.'

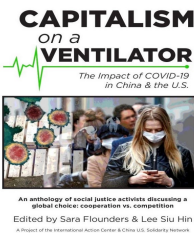
March 2020, White House COVID-19 Press Conferences

In the first two weeks of March 2020, President Trump held two press conferences where he was joined by CEOs from big business, and the pharmaceutical, biotech and healthcare industries. Trump and the CEOs talked about meeting timelines to quickly develop testing and vaccines.(5)(6) There was no discussion of manual tracing, fast geographic lockdowns, combined with intensive treatment -- all components that were proving to be crucial in Asia to prevent super-spreading. In addition, Dr. Deborah Birtix, Trump's White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator, added an absurd statement promoting American exceptionalism. She said, South Korea was showing positivity rates at 3 and 4 percent in their testing, while U.S. testing companies, LabCorp and Quest, were showing much better, lower positivity rates of 1 and 2 percent.(7) Now, a year after Birtix made these 'the U.S. is superior' comments, this country tragically has the fourth highest COVID-19 death rate in the world, per demographic, (after Belgium, the UK, and Italy) at 1,656 deaths/1mil pop. In contrast, South Korea has 33 deaths/1 mil pop and China has 3 deaths/1 mil pop -- two of the lowest rates in the world.(8) Jeremy Konyndyk, a public health policy expert wrote a rare admission in his article in *Foreign Affairs*, titled, "Exceptionalism Is Killing Americans: An Insular Political Culture Failed the Test of the Pandemic." He concluded, "If the United States cannot adapt its approach to reflect lessons learned from around the world, it risks an indefinite limbo of intolerable mortality levels and sustained economic stagnation."(9)



A New Anthology: *Capitalism on a Ventilator*

Capitalism on a Ventilator: The Impact of COVID-19 in China & the U.S. is an anthology written by over 50 authors, activists and journalists, edited by Sara Flounders and Lee Siu Hin.(10) This anthology explains why the U.S. and China have taken such opposite approaches to the global fight against COVID-19.



The U.S. took a capitalist approach, protecting big business, property and profits. As COVID-19 swept through U.S. communities, systemic racism and ageism escalated resulting in BIPOC, low-income, and elderly communities becoming the most vulnerable to premature death.

The U.S. BIPOC community has had a COVID-19 death rate of twice that of white communities(11) and the elderly, over 85 years, have suffered one third of the U.S. death count as of March 3, 2021(155,175 of 494,235 deaths).(12) In addition in the U.S., these massive pandemic casualties have been coupled with the worst capitalist economic crash since the Great Depression.

Capitalism on a Ventilator, describes how most of the U.S. media and political class keep a 'blame game' going toward China. Authors Carlos Martinez and Vijay Prashad dispel the myth that China withheld information and give evidence that China communicated with the United States' Center for Disease Control (CDC) as early as December 31st and released

the genome for the virus in early January. This current 'blame game' is being used by the U.S. to distract its citizens from the fact that the government has been so ruinous and irresponsible in regard to the pandemic and economy, and toward millions around the world who are being harmed by U.S. imperial policy -- sanctions against Iran and Venezuela or with military provocations toward China. Journalist Ajamu Baraka describes the psychopathology of white supremacy as blinding U.S. policy-makers to the reality of the U.S.'s decline as a global power. Baraka states, "Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared in public that the United States and its Western European allies must put China in "its proper place," which represents a white supremacist mindset that inevitably will lead to monumental errors of judgment."(13)

Capitalism on a Ventilator describes how China, in contrast to the U.S. took a socialist, public health approach, quickly contained COVID-19 and preserved its economy. Deaths due to COVID-19 are less than 5,000, and it is predicted that China's economy will surpass the U.S. economy two years ahead of schedule. Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now*, recently noted the contrast between the U.S. and China regarding vaccines: "The United States and China are taking markedly different approaches to vaccines and the COVID pandemic. While the United States faces accusations of hoarding vaccines and blocking efforts to waive vaccine patent rights at the World Trade Organization, China has shipped millions of vaccine doses to nations in the Global South in what's been described as a form of vaccine diplomacy. China has sent free samples of Sinovac's vaccine to 53 countries and has exported it to 22 nations that have placed orders. Recipients include Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia."(14)



Conclusion

I was stunned by the recent white supremacist and misogynist massacre of eight people, including six Asian women in Atlanta. In my opinion, this mass shooting can be directly linked to the bigotry and violence promoted by U.S. political elites in their demonization of China. President Trump used racist slurs speaking of "kung flu" and the "Wuhan virus" and Biden's Secretary of State, Antony Blinkin, several days ago, made this threatening statement toward China: "China is the only country with the economic, diplomatic, military



and technological power to seriously challenge the stable and open international system, all the rules, values and relationships that make the world work the way we want it to, because it ultimately serves the interests and reflects the values of the American people."(15)

Hate crimes against Asian Americans living in major cities rose 150–200 percent in 2020.(16) U.S. anti-Asian racism goes back to the 1800s which makes it easy for the political elites to rekindle it, particularly when China refuses to be controlled by U.S. We need an immediate and movement and critical citizen response against these hate crimes and against the demonization of China.

[See National Day of Action, March 27th](#)

I think this pandemic is now allowing the world to look at the U.S. and China in a new light. Carlos Martinez writes in *Capitalism on a Ventilator*: "Chinese socialism is defeating COVID-19: In capitalist countries, governments are essentially under the control of capital; in socialist countries, capital is essentially under the control of the government." (17) *Capitalism on a Ventilator* helped me look around the world to see who is learning from the pandemic and who is slipping into obsolescence, as we will all be faced with the climate crisis and more pandemics in the immediate future.



CITATIONS

(1) Altakarli, N.S. *China's Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak: A Model for Epidemic Preparedness and Management*. Dubai Medical Journal, March 2020, <https://www.karger.com/Article/FullText/508448>. Accessed 09 March 2021.

(2) Terhune, Chad. *Special Report: How Korea trounced U.S. in race to test people for coronavirus*. REUTERS, March 18, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-testing-specialrep/special-report-how-korea-trounced-u-s-in-race-to-test-people-for-coronavirus-idUSKBN2153BW>. Accessed 10 March 2021.

(3) Huang, Yasheng. *How Digital Contact Tracing Slowed Covid-19 in East Asia*, Harvard Business Review, April 15, 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-digital-contact-tracing-slowed-covid-19-in-east-asia>. Accessed 08 March 2021.

(4) Perrone, Alessio. *Beating COVID-19: What The East Got Right And West Got Wrong*, WORLDCRUNCH, February 11, 2020, <https://worldcrunch.com/coronavirus/beating-covid-19-what-the-east-got-right-and-west-got-wrong>. Accessed 09 March 2021.

(5) *President Trump Meeting with Pharmaceutical Executives on Coronavirus*. C-SPAN, March 2, 2020, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?469926-1/president-trump-meeting-pharmaceutical-executives-coronavirus>. Accessed 08 March 2021.

(6) *President Trump with Coronavirus Task Force Briefing*. C-SPAN, March 13, 2020, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?470351-1/president-trump-declares-national-emergency-response-coronavirus>. Accessed 09 March 2021.

- (7) *President Trump Meeting with Pharmaceutical Executives on Coronavirus*. C-SPAN, March 2, 2020, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?469926-1/president-trump-meeting-pharmaceutical-executives-coronavirus>. Accessed 08 March 2021.
- (8) *Reported Cases of Death by Country or Territory*. WORLDOMETER, March 14, 2021, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>. Accessed 14 March 2021.
- (9) Konyndyk, Jeremy. *Exceptionalism Is Killing Americans: An Insular Political Culture Failed the Test of the Pandemic*. Foreign Affairs, June 8, 2020, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-08/exceptionalism-killing-americans?utm_medium=email_notifications&utm_source=reg_confirmation&utm_campaign=reg_guestpass. Accessed 13 March 2021.
- (10) Flounders, Sara, et al. *Capitalism on a Ventilator: The Impact of Covid-19 in China & the U.S.* World View Forum, 2020.
- (11) APM Research Lab Staff. *The Color of Coronavirus: Covid-19 Deaths by Race and Ethnicity*. APM Research Lab, March 5, 2021, <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race>. Accessed 08 March 2021.
- (12) Jackson, Derrick Z. *As the virus rages through Washington, essential workers nationwide are paying the price*. Environmental Health News, October 14, 2020, <https://www.ehn.org/essential-workers-health-covid-19-2648193289/virus-spreads-racial-disparities-persist>. Accessed 07 March 2021.
- (13) Flounders, Sara, et al. *Capitalism on a Ventilator: The Impact of Covid-19 in China & the U.S.* World View Forum, 2020.
- (14) Goodman, Amy. *Vijay Prashad Warns Biden Is "Doubling Down" on Trump's Anti-China Cold War Policy*. Democracy NOW!, March 16, 2021, https://www.democracynow.org/2021/3/16/vijay_prashad_us_china_rivalry. Accessed 16 March 2021.
- (15) Goodman, Amy. *Vijay Prashad Warns Biden Is "Doubling Down" on Trump's Anti-China Cold War Policy*. Democracy NOW!, March 16, 2021, https://www.democracynow.org/2021/3/16/vijay_prashad_us_china_rivalry. Accessed 16 March 2021.
- (16) Mystal, Elie. *The Massacre in Atlanta Was As Predictable as White Supremacy*. The Nation., March 18, 2021, <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/atlanta-massacre-hate/>. Accessed 18 March 2021.
- (17) Flounders, Sara, et al. *Capitalism on a Ventilator: The Impact of Covid-19 in China & the U.S.* World View Forum, 2020.

