

What Will the Future Think of Us?

I love reading histories and biographies.

Because of my interest in the past, a particular fantasy is pestering me. What if I could return from the grave in fifty years or more, and see what historians of the future might have written of the time in which I have lived, particularly the last 30 years? What might they say about the prevalence of abortion, for example, in an age when all manner of contraceptives can be purchased in our pharmacies and grocery stores? What might they say of the current push for socialism and the rioting in our streets?

Most particularly, these days I wonder what they will say about the COVID-19 pandemic. Will they scratch their heads in puzzlement, as some of us do now, at the response by governments and individuals to this virus?

Will those descendants of Herodotus, Livy, and Gibbon condemn Communist China for its initial silence about the coronavirus, thereby allowing it to spread around the world?

Will they be able to figure out why some governors shoved coronavirus cases into nursing homes, causing mini-pandemics and many deaths in those facilities?

Perhaps they will look at our months-long shutdown and quarantine as a necessary measure. Or they may view it as an unwarranted policy that did far more harm than good.

Will they be astonished that we sometimes banned the use of hydroxychloroquine to check and treat COVID-19, or will they decide we were wise to refuse this drug to those in the early stages of the disease? Fifty years down the road they may be able to untangle all the misinformation surrounding victims of

the virus and conclude that science and medicine were politicized and the number of deaths exaggerated.

Will they applaud the various measures we are taking to avoid catching the virus – social distancing, masks, the closing of schools and churches – or will they hoot with laughter at our foolishness?

They will likely wonder why we permitted protests and riots, opened our casinos, and made some businesses “essential” while forcing schools and churches to close. They may also question why small businesses were forced to lock their doors, many of them forever.

The children of today will be tomorrow’s historians, youngsters who witnessed firsthand shuttered schoolhouses, the bungling and inefficiency of many online classes, isolation from their friends, and the plight of their parents – who, if they were lucky, worked from home and who, if unlucky, lost their jobs and businesses, and were made ill with despair and depression. What set of prejudices will they bring to their research and papers?

Finally, how will these future historians judge the performances of our leaders, politicians, scientists, and so-called “experts?” Did they behave with prudence, temperance, and justice in the face of disaster, or will historians regard many of them as failures, men and women who were inept in the execution of their duties, or who, even worse, used this virus as a pretext to advance their own careers and agendas?

One thing we know for certain: those future judges will take an interest in 2020. We are undergoing an event of great historic importance, a crisis with ramifications for our entire culture, our American way of life, and the future of our children and grandchildren. The world as we knew it has slipped from beneath our feet and we are entering new territory, a strange and forbidding wilderness that has all of

us confused and some of us terrified. On our trek there are too many incompetent guides, few maps, and no compasses, no true north to lead us to the right path. We stagger onward, wary and downhearted, uncertain at this point of our destination, indeed of any resolution of this catastrophe that has engulfed us.

Here is part of our difficulty: unlike those future chroniclers of our time, we are simply too close to this cataclysm to stand aside and evaluate it calmly and wisely. Uncertainty breeds fear, and we are experiencing both at the moment.

Yet if we are mindful of our available resources, we can find strength as we make this journey. We can take courage from our religious faith, our stouthearted friends, and our families.

We can also find encouragement and help in our history books, the stories of our ancestors who once faced what must have seemed insurmountable odds: Washington at Valley Forge, Lincoln in his darkest hours in the White House, the world in the grip of the influenza epidemic following World War I, American workers in the depths of the Great Depression, our soldiers, sailors, and Marines in World War II.

The Old Book tells us “And the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.”

So here’s a final question: Will we leave to future generations a house founded upon a rock or a shack built on sand?

Historians in 2070 will know the answer.

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