

CYNICISM GROWING OVER COVID EDICTS

Ideally, the public should follow the advice of public health experts in times of a pandemic. They should also listen to news reports, and abide by what their elected officials have to say. Court decisions also merit respect. But when doctors, journalists, politicians and judges act inconsistently, evincing a political bias, cynicism is not only predictable, it is warranted.

On July 29, President Trump and his supporters gathered in Midland, Texas for an event. Most wore masks and practiced social distancing, but some did not. Dr. William Schaffner, a professor at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, was upset with the few who ignored the advice of experts. "Why are they in that large group? They shouldn't be gathering in groups."

Schaffner should have been asked why some are not cooperating. Instead, he called them names, saying they were "dumb."

A more rational response to what is going on was given two months ago by William A. Jacobson, a Cornell University professor. "The riots have ripped the mask off the mainstream media politicized coronavirus hysteria. When it was politically convenient, the media shamed and attacked people who wanted to reopen their stores or even gather at the beach. Now that rioters and looters are gathering in large numbers, the media no longer cares about social distancing, because the media sympathizes with them."

Politicians also sympathize with the protesters. New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy was unhappy with store owners for protesting his shutdown decree, however he said it was entirely legitimate to protest racism. He said it was "one

thing to protest what day nail salons are opening, and it's another to come out in peaceful protest." In other words, if he likes the cause of the protest, people can take to the streets without following social distancing guidelines.

Murphy was outdone by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. He was asked why he was cracking down on religious gatherings while allowing anti-racism protesters the right to disregard social distancing norms. "We're in the middle of a national crisis, a deep-seated national crisis. There is no comparison." Again, it is not mass gatherings that matter, it is what the masses are gathering for that matters.

When asked if the spike in coronavirus cases following the protests was related to those who took to the streets, the mayor said, "I would be surprised if that's what's causing it." He cited no evidence for his conviction. In any event, he instructed the contact-tracing task force not to ask those who tested positive for the virus if they recently attended a Black Lives Matter protest. But it was okay to ask if someone recently attended a church service.

Judges are looking just as bad. The U.S. Supreme Court recently said it was okay for Nevada to allow crowds to gather in the casinos but not the churches. Justice Neil Gorsuch called out the duplicity saying, "there is no world in which the Constitution permits Nevada to favor Caesars Palace over Calvary Chapel."

Many in the media want the protests to continue, but not church gatherings. No one likes this outcome better than *New York Times* legal correspondent Linda Greenhouse. She loved the Supreme Court 5-4 decision, going into a fury over the dissenters. She accused them of engaging in a "religious crusade," decrying what she said was "the ferocity of the main dissenting opinion." After reading her boilerplate commentary, it seems plain that she would not raise an eyebrow if the churches were ordered to shut down indefinitely.

Portland has been ravaged by left-wing activists for over two months. Obviously, social distancing does not apply to them. Oregonlive likes it that way. It ran a lengthy piece expressing great concern for outdoor gatherings in state parks, without ever mentioning the threat to public health caused by the anarchists.

Bars are being busted and shuttered all over the nation, and this is exactly what Dr. Anthony Fauci wants. At the end of June he said, "Congregation at a bar, inside, is bad news. We really got to stop that right now."

What if someone is seeking anonymous sex online? Would that be okay? Fauci said, "If you're willing to take the risk—and you know, everybody has their own tolerance for risks—you could figure out if you want to meet somebody." He concluded, "If you want to go a little bit more intimate, well, then that's your choice regarding risk." He did not explain how strangers can have sex while social distancing.

In other words, Fauci is telling those looking for online sex that the risk is on you, but when it comes to those who want to take the risk of going to their neighborhood bar for a beer, they need to be stopped.

We have come to this stage of cynicism precisely because of the "boy who cried wolf" syndrome. The politicians, judges, journalists, and doctors who send mixed messages are to blame. Only they can rectify the damage they have done to their reputations, never mind the damage they have done to public health.