

COVID-19, THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND TRUMP'S INEQUITIES

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Introduction

In much of the world, independent of ideology, covid-19 has spread because of an underestimation of the severity of the virus, delays in taking action and irresponsible leaders. In terms of irresponsible leadership, Donald Trump wins hands down. He said he wouldn't wear a mask because he had no symptoms, he felt fine and didn't want to give the press the pleasure of seeing him masked, he appeared every day for a month on TV surrounded by subordinates none of whom wore a mask and he had many meetings without a mask. Trump visited factories and met with World War II veterans, some of whom were over 95, without wearing a mask nor being concerned about them getting infected.² In his first two campaign rallies in Oklahoma and Arizona in June, Trump brought together thousands of people without masks, and as a result, eight members of his team and six Secret Service agents got infected (Arizona has 1.6% of the total population of European Union and was registering the same number of daily covid-19 cases as the E.U.). By mid-August 2020, the number of cases in the U.S. had surpassed 5 million, the number of deaths had reached 170,000, and both statistics were trending upwards. These figures represent 25% of the world total, while the U.S. makes up 4% of the world's total population.

Prime minister Boris Johnson continued to shake hands, got infected, and ended up in intensive care. In May, the United Kingdom had the greatest number of covid-related deaths in Europe and the second highest covid-related mortality in the world.

President Jair Bolsonaro, a Trump clone, called the virus "a little flu", urged Brazilians not to self-isolate, called the state governments that imposed restrictions scoundrels, said that he regretted the deaths but that that was "everyone's destiny" and stopped the publication of statistics on new cases and deaths. In his visit to the White House, a member of his delegation was infected. In just one month, two health ministers resigned over conflicts with Bolsonaro and he appointed as minister a general with no knowledge of health care. By mid-August, Brazil had registered more than 3 million covid cases (including Bolsonaro, who tested positive in July), and 102,000 deaths, second only to the U.S.

The Chinese government experienced the first covid-19 case on December 10, 2019, and hid it. It later imprisoned the doctor who denounced the outbreak and subsequently died from it, before it completely shut down Wuhan. Had it acted immediately; the cases could have been reduced by 95%.

President Manuel López Obrador assured Mexicans that the Aztecs are a special race that would prove resistant to covid-19, he embraced hundreds of people at rallies, asked the population to continue going out on the streets and urged them to kiss, and displayed amulets that he asserted would protect him. By mid-August, Mexico had close to 500,000 cases and 53,000 deaths, and there was scientific consensus that the numbers were seriously underestimated (data from Johns Hopkins University Press).

This irresponsibility extended to a minister in Tampa, Orthodox rabbis in New York and Muslims in Pakistan, who refused to close their churches, synagogues, and mosques, sparking infections. On May 22, Trump demanded states open houses of worship "immediately," declaring them "essential," because we "need more prayer." If the states didn't obey his order, he would overrule them (Baker,

2020a). This order came from a man who boasted he could touch any woman's genitals, got divorced three times, used campaign funds to silence a porn star he had sex with, uttered more than 15,000 verified lies,³ and has been sued multiple times for fraud because of his million-dollar swindles (obvious sins). The only reason for his order was to ensure the vote of ultraconservative religious communities in the U.S., especially the Evangelicals, who refuse to recognize the obvious contradiction in presidential conduct.

All the parties cited above are responsible for the extension of the pandemic and the hundreds of thousands of deaths in their countries and throughout the world.

This article focuses on an issue not studied until now: the inequality that covid-19 has generated and broadened among population groups, using the U.S. as an example.⁴ This inequality is analyzed based on what in Spanish is termed the *Ley del embudo*. Literally translated as "the funnel law," this expression is commonly used to denounce an obvious injustice that no one dares redress, which often arises out of a confrontation in which, contrary to the rules of equity, the stronger party, not the party who has right on his side, always wins.⁵ In other words, like a funnel, the system is broad on the top for the rich and powerful, and narrow at the bottom for the poor and defenseless. A perfect application of this double standard is Donald Trump. The fundamental objective in his life has always been the pursuit of wealth, power, and his personal well-being at the expense of everything else, with no attention to the terrible consequences of his actions. The inequity of Trump, his family and his Republican allies has aggravated economic and social inequality among various U.S. population groups, which are fragmented by income, power, ideology, race, gender, age, citizenship, and state of residence. The pandemic has only reinforced these disparities.⁶

This article marshals abundant evidence to analyze the inequity behind Trump's policies. It does so first by analyzing the economy, with special emphasis in his 2017 tax reform and another 2020 proposal. Secondly, it documents the president's late, ill-fated policy (or lack thereof) on the pandemic, in subordination to his interests. Third, it examines the unconstitutionality of his statement that he had total power over the states. Fourth, it identifies numerous cases in which Trump, his family, and his allies, as well as large corporations, have benefited from covid-19. Fifth, it studies the economic stimulus packages, their initial concentration of aid to large corporations, the Democratic battle to make the aid more equitable, and the unequal distribution of funds. Sixth, it demonstrates how triage (maximizing insufficient resources in times of disaster by prioritizing patients according to their level of need while factoring in the degree of probability that they will benefit from treatment or survive), which theoretically, must be objective and ethical, but in practice, gives preference to the rich and powerful while sacrificing the poor, the elderly, the Hispanics and the Afro-Americans. Seventh, it analyzes the people's reaction to Trump's covid-19 policy and its potential impact on the elections, exploring possible scenarios whereby he might attempt to stay in power.

1. The Paradigm of the Funnel Law in Economic Policy: Tax Reform

Since the beginning of his administration, Trump has taken actions that favor the rich. The best example is the 2017 tax reform ("Tax Cuts..." 2017), which reduced the maximum tax paid by corporations from 35% to 21%. In this way, the richest 1% of the population (making five million dollars or more a year) were the beneficiaries of between 70% and 83% of the total tax cut. The excuse provided was that the fortune generated in savings would be invested in the economy, making up for the resulting deficit. This didn't happen, because the beneficiaries swallowed up the flood of money coming their way, or increased dividends to their shareholders. Although it is true that the reform doubled the general deduction for people paying income tax, it is also true that it set iron-clad limits for other deductions, such as the real estate taxes, state and municipal taxes, and mortgage

payments, so that for the middle class these limitations usually outweighed the expansion in the personal deduction. It is projected that by 2025, 53% of taxpayers will pay more taxes than in 2017.

Because of the speed with which the reform was pushed through and Republican maneuvers behind its passage – by simple majority and not two-thirds of the Congress, as was required -- many loopholes remained, which gave the Treasury Department a great deal of flexibility in drafting its regulations. Corporate lobbyists took advantage of these regulations to achieve larger tax cuts and infringe some of their obligations. One such duty has to do with those companies with headquarters abroad, where they pay less taxes, exporting jobs and resources to increase their profits. This was a major bone of contention for Trump in the 2016 campaign. These companies would have been required to pay a tax in the United States equal to 10.5% of their income, but they were exempted, which saved them billions of dollars and provided them an incentive to continue their conduct. Another violation is that a tax cut to incentivize the construction of housing in poor communities has been used for high-end developments in affluent neighborhoods, benefitting, at times, those with connections to the Trump administration (Drucker and Tankersley, 2019).

In May of 2020, Trump and his Republican allies were planning a second tax reform that would further reduce taxes on the wealthy, including: a reduction or elimination of the capital gains tax, the deduction by companies of any investments they make now or in the future, the suspension of the payroll tax paid by employers (contributions to workers' pensions, unemployment and health), an expansion in the deduction allowed for corporate expenses on food and entertainment, and setting legal limits on liability for businesses. These plans also involved making the 2017 reform, which by law is set to expire in 2025, permanent (Tankersley, 2020a). In the narrow part of the Trumpian funnel, as will be analyzed later, the Republicans have opposed aid to millions of unemployed (it is estimated that 42% of the jobs lost will not be recouped with the reopening, and workers who do not accept offers of work out of a fear of getting infected will lose their jobs and unemployment assistance) and haggled over federal assistance to states that are on the front lines of the battle against covid-19. Unemployment has led to 5.4 million workers (24 million people, if one includes their families) losing their health insurance, 40% more than during the Great Recession (Stolberg, 2020c).

In addition, tax enforcement has been drastically reduced. Setting a perverse example, Trump asserted in the 2016 campaign that he could not make public his income tax returns, as was traditional among his predecessors, because he was being audited, but that he would do so later. After more than three years, he has not kept his promise, alleging that he is exempt from compliance with the law because as president, he enjoys absolute immunity. At the same time, the Department of Justice has argued that the president is entitled to a treatment different than that of any other citizen (CNN, June 21, 2010). In 2019, Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance subpoenaed eight years of Trump's personal and corporate tax returns. The case made its way to the Supreme Court, which ruled that Trump was not immune from state criminal investigation. The Supreme Court ruling, however, did allow Trump to return to U.S. District Court in New York City, where he had initially contested the subpoena, and raise new objections. Vance is also investigating the allegation that Trump inflated his wealth to secure multi-million-dollar loans from Deutsche Bank, thereby committing bank fraud. Deutsche Bank has agreed to deliver the records (Rashbaum and Weiser, 2020; Enrich et al., 2020).

In 2018, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) stated it would be unable to audit multimillionaires because its budget had been slashed by three billion dollars and the Service had lost tens of thousands of employees (there are today less auditors than in 1953). The big corporations and those earning more than 10 million dollars a year used to be audited annually. Now, they are twice as likely to escape scrutiny: the wealthiest 0.5% represent 20% of the income that is hidden from the IRS, which equals 50 billion dollars annually (Eisenger and Kiel, 2018). Conversely, the IRS increased its audits of the middle class (whose taxable income is less complex – generally salaries from which the tax

is automatically deducted – and who cannot hire tax attorneys), through the use of computers and triggers that detect possible infractions. Furthermore, a third of all the audits focus on the tax credit to the poor, who are required to prove that they are eligible. In summary, not only have the rich received a fortune, but now they can avoid paying taxes or under-declare them with impunity, while the opposite is happening with middle- and low-income groups, thereby aggravating the inequity of the tax system.

The fortune gifted to the wealthy expanded the budget deficit by 1.1 billion dollars in 2018, when the U.S. registered the greatest drop in tax revenue and the largest budget deficit of any of the 36 member states of the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (Drucker y Tankersley, 2019). To “compensate,” the Trump administration proposed a two-trillion cut in social welfare programs such as food stamps for the poor (alleging that they constitute an incentive for people not to work), school lunch programs, student loans, Medicaid, and social security old-age and disability pensions. In addition, it capped social security pensions. When they exceed this limit, between 50% and 85% of social security receipts are taxable at the individual’s personal tax rate (Social Security, 2020).

At the Davos Economic Forum in 2020, Trump responded to a question about whether more cuts in social programs, such as pensions, would be “on his plate”: “At some point, they will be... That’s actually the easiest of all things” (CNBC, 2020).” It wasn’t necessary to wait that long. In May, a secret Trump plan was revealed. Its aim: to have the financial assistance provided Americans during the pandemic deducted from future social security pensions. The House of Representatives has demanded that the White House forward it all the documentation on this. Alex Lawson, Executive Director of Social Security Works, an advocacy group, called the plan, which would have forced workers to choose between “going hungry today or working until you die,” a “moral abomination” (Johnson, 2020). Recently, 89% of Americans surveyed said they were in favor of higher taxes on the rich and using those resources to reduce poverty (Kristof, 2020c).

2. Trump’s Covid-19 Policy: Late, Chaotic, Inefficient and Unequitable

In 2017, the Obama administration’s National Security Council (NSC) left Trump a detailed plan to respond to a pandemic. Furthermore, at the request of the NSC in September, 2019, White House economists published another study, warning that a pandemic could kill half a million Americans and devastate the economy; they urged it not be compared to the flu (Tankersley, 2020c). Not only did Trump ignore this warning; he asserted that covid-19 was similar to the flu, which, he affirmed, caused more deaths. He delayed anti-covid measures for two months, predicted it would mysteriously disappear when the temperature increased (the arrival of the summer demonstrated what a yarn that was), and blamed “fake news” and the “enemies of the people” (critical media), along with the Democrats, for having exaggerated the danger for political gain. According to Columbia University, Trump’s delay in taking action, only for two weeks, cost 56,000 lives (Glanz and Robertson, 2020). The pioneers in imposing mandatory restrictions were the governors of states, such as New York, severely affected by the virus, a strategy that managed to reduce the numbers of new cases. Trump declared that he was not responsible for the policy against the pandemic, since this was a concern for the states.

In a long and well documented article (labeled by Trump as “fake”), the New York Times proved how, since January, the president had been informed of the danger of the virus by various U.S. agencies and health advisers, who urged rapid action. He, however, was concentrating on the impeachment proceedings and his trade agreement with China, which he did not want to antagonize, because the treaty would be key for his reelection (that treaty is now in limbo because of Trump’s accusation that China is not purchasing the agricultural products it committed to buying from the U.S. and his attacks against Chinese leaders because of the virus). In addition, the economic advisers

warned of the harm the economy would suffer, another key aspect to Trump's staying in power. The Times article describes the fragmentation within the administration, which has been aggravated by Trump's chaotic conduct and his tendency to follow his instincts instead of scientific advice (Lipton et al., 2020). The president got angry at a member of his staff who had publicly mentioned the danger, branding him an alarmist.

As is his custom, Trump shifted the blame on the matter to China and the World Health Organization (WHO). Against all scientific evidence, he accused the former of manufacturing the virus in a laboratory. He accused WHO of delaying the warning and action against covid-19, although that is exactly what he did. Trump has stated he will take the U.S. out of the WHO, in spite of the fact that he would have to get congressional approval to do so, and it would be chaotic to take such action in the midst of the pandemic (McNeil and Jacobs, 2020). He has also repeatedly blamed former President Obama for not having a plan against the coronavirus (Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell admitted he had made a mistake in accusing the former president of not having a plan [LeBlanc, 2020]), and for not leaving stocks of masks and other necessary products. More recently, he accused Obama of sending people to spy on him in order to delegitimize his presidency ("Obamagate"), "the biggest political crime and scandal in the history of the USA," and urged Republican Senator Lindsay Graham, a major ally, to launch an investigation (Baker, 2020b).⁷

At the beginning of March, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin emphasized that the shutdowns would be devastating for the economy, to which an NSC advisor responded that exactly that would happen if the necessary precautionary measures were not taken by the government. The collapse in the stock market was the fillip that made the president change course. ("It's the economy, stupid!"). He thus called for social distancing (without making it mandatory) until April 15. Continued declines in the stock market moved business leaders, Republican politicians, and Fox News to urge Trump to reopen the economy because a severe recession would be catastrophic for his reelection.

On March 22, Trump tweeted, "The cure cannot be worse than the problem itself [the virus]." The following day, in a Fox News interview, chief White House economic advisor Larry Kudlow confirmed this: "The president is right. The cure can't be worse than the disease. And we're going to have to make some difficult trade-offs." In other words, if we have to choose between money and death, we will sacrifice on the latter (Kuns, 2020). A member of the Antioch City Planning Commission in California supported social Darwinism: the virus would only kill "the elderly, the homeless and people with weak immune systems," which would "fix what is a significant burden on our society." ("Coronavirus...", 2020). A Republican congressman from Indiana confirmed this line of thinking: "In the choice between the loss of our way of life as Americans and the loss...of American lives, we have to always choose the latter" (Fredericks, 2020). Nevertheless, a poll taken at the end of June showed that a solid majority of the people believe that the federal government's priority should be to contain the virus even if that means harming the economy (Lerer et al., 2020). The president, irresponsibly complacent, said it would be fantastic to have the churches packed on Easter Sunday. Nevertheless, the projected 100,000 deaths, and the warning by Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the most prominent member of the White House Covid-19 Task Force, that lifting the restrictions would deepen the crisis and wreak economic havoc, in addition to making the virus more difficult to control, forced Trump to extend social distancing guidelines until the end of April (he termed the previous failed goal "aspirational"). On April 10, however, he once again put a relaunching of economic activity on the table, saying there would be only 60,000 deaths instead of 100,000, hiding the fact that the decrease in projections was due to the restrictions imposed by the states. On May 27, officially declared deaths surpassed the 100,000 mark. The Departments of Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security, warned that lifting the restrictions could, 30 days later, lead to a second wave of infection and death worse than the first wave, in addition to a more severe recession. Health expert Anna Scherbina predicted that seven weeks of lockdown would be necessary under optimal conditions,

and eight months in a worst case scenario, to flatten the curve, but that would save two million lives, which would be lost without implementing restrictions, not to mention a cost to the economy of 13 trillion dollars, or 66% of the GDP projected for 2020 before covid-19 (*The Intellectualist*, April 1, 2020).

The economic reopening will aggravate labor inequality: less educated, lower income workers, a majority of whom are Afro-American and Hispanic, who are employed in manual occupations, will have to physically return to work and expose themselves to infection (taking on the work/health dilemma), while the large white majority of those with higher education, who work in white-collar jobs, will continue to be able to work from home.

3. The Declaration of Total Power over States in Determining an Early Reopening

Trump asserted the powers granted by the Defense Production Act in times of national emergency, but has fallen short in the following: a) he has failed to design an effective, mandatory plan to take on the health crisis and initiate reopening while minimizing deaths; b) he has failed to create a unified federal command center to coordinate all the measures; c) from the outset, he has failed to use the strategic national stockpile of medicines and equipment to combat the pandemic, because “that stockpile is ours” and the problem must be resolved by the states, which sparked a competition among them and an escalation of prices; d) he lied when he assured the public that diagnostic tests were available for any person requesting them;⁸ e) he delayed the purchase of additional supplies and held back on ordering private firms to manufacture them until the pandemic reached alarming levels; f) he accused various governors (especially New York’s) of exaggerating their needs;⁹ and finally, g) he began to send ventilators and masks in dribs and drabs, demanding that states not complain so much and show “their appreciation.” On the contrary, Trump maintains his battle to put an end to Obamacare¹⁰ (he prevented a new round of registrations in spite of the pandemic), which would leave 20 million people unprotected (especially women, because they lack coverage), although he has no system to replace it. In view of all this, that Trump could send millions of masks to China and promise Kim Jong-un that he would send help to deal with the pandemic is shocking.

On April 13, in announcing his intention to reopen the economy, Trump emphatically stated, “When somebody’s president of the United States, the authority is total... And the governors know that,” in flagrant contradiction to his previous statement that he was not responsible for curbing covid-19, but rather, the states. Journalists questioned him on the bases for his assertion. Trump mentioned “numerous provisions,” without citing even one and suddenly stopped the questions (Jacobs et al., 2020). The Constitution stipulates that the states, not the federal government, have the authority to respond to a health crisis and to decide when the restrictions are ended. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo refuted Trump: “No, that’s not true...It’s not legal. It’s a total abrogation of the Constitution—10th Amendment specifically says power to the states. The Constitution says we don’t have a king.” Cuomo indicated he would turn down a presidential order to reopen the state (Villarreal, 2020). Ten governors (all Democrats, except one) who have taken restrictive measures agreed to decide how and when the restrictions will be lifted. Showing his anger over this, Trump declared it to be “a riot.”¹¹ The governors won the confrontation; on April 16, Trump said they would decide how and when to proceed with reopening, based on data on the pandemic and when it seemed to be regressing. He only gave some non-mandatory guidelines on steps to take. The governors, however, claimed that it was necessary to conduct massive testing before reopening their states, for which they needed federal aid.¹² Not only did Trump refuse to do this; he urged his fanatical supporters to demonstrate to demand reopening, thereby fomenting transmission and deepening still further the country’s divisions. In the state of Wisconsin, the Supreme Court, controlled by the conservatives, backed the protestors against the governor, forcing him to lift his restrictions on businesses and meetings, although not schools. In Pennsylvania, majority Republican counties, in combination with some businesses, challenged the Democratic governor, demanding a

more extensive and rapid reopening (Beck, 2020; Wolf, 2020a). The protestors carried weapons such as AR-15 semiautomatic rifles, and even a missile launcher. People wearing masks or policemen who asked unmasked individuals to put their masks on have been assaulted. All this took place although surveys showed that between 70 and 90% of the entire country supported the restrictions, even if that meant suspending some freedoms and causing economic harm. Nevertheless, the tendency among some Republicans is changing, as will be shown later.

On May 4, six states reopened their economies, following Trump's public exhortations to "liberate" the states" (Lee et al., 2020; Bosman et al., 2020b). Various Republican governors rapidly expressed support for the president. Texas Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick, in an interview on Fox News, urged reopening, saying that the elderly should risk their health to favor the economy: "Let's go back to work... Those of us who are 70 plus, we'll take care of ourselves. But don't sacrifice the country" (Leonardi, 2020). Despite the enormous criticism levelled against his insensitivity, one month later, he reaffirmed that "there are more important things than living. And that's saving this country" (Samuels, 2020). Georgia's Republican governor, Brian Kemp, reopened the state despite the criticisms by health experts that virus infections and deaths were on the upswing; as predicted, the number of cases and deaths has increased. The second most populous state in the U.S., Texas, with 30 million inhabitants, reopened its economy practically overnight after a very short lockdown. In June, the number of cases doubled, and the governor had to stop the process and order the use of masks (Glanz and Robertson, 2020; Bosman, 2020; Fausset et al., 2020). Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, a Trump devotee who also does not wear a mask, opened up the state although only 2% of the population had been tested. Statistics from the examiners indicated a higher number of deaths than the official data. The governor prohibited the release of those figures. In addition, when visitors from northern states spending the winter in Florida died of covid-19, their deaths were reported in their states of origin (Ross, 2020; Merchante and Cetoute, 2020). Furthermore, many deaths from the virus were recorded as pneumonia, cardiac problems, or other illnesses. Florida's state health department data manager was fired by the governor after she expressed her concern over these issues. By mid-July, the number of daily cases in Florida shot up (15,300 in a single day), breaking all records, and the governor announced he would put the reopening on hold, but that he wouldn't move to close down businesses. Nevertheless, the magnitude of new cases led mayors to close bars, order the use of masks, declare a curfew, and in some municipalities, they closed the beaches a second time (Martin, 2020a; Stolberg and Weiland, 2020b). On the other hand, Disney World in Orlando reopened and will be a new source of infections. The ploys by DeSantis in Florida and Bolsonaro in Brazil are being imitated by Trump and Vice President Mike Pence to cover up real nationwide figures on the impact of covid-19 (see below).

Two months after the declaration of the pandemic, the president still lacked a national plan to reopen the country, and he passed that decision on to the states (he once again refused to take responsibility for the consequences of reopening). The states were to take steps to ensure that contagion and deaths were kept to a minimum. Of the 27 states that reopened, only 19 met CDC reopening guidelines and the remainder were still seeing an upswing in daily infections. Only the state of New York was experiencing a drop in cases and the governor was being very cautious in reopening. Christi Grimm, the federal inspector general charged with supervising the pandemic, with more than two decades of experience with both Republican and Democratic administrations, criticized the ups and downs and contradictions of the president's policy. An irritated Trump called the findings in her report "wrong," accused Grimm of being an Obama agent and fired her (Segers, 2020). Such behavior has continued to be employed against any independent-minded civil service employee whose duty it is to control abuses of power (At the time this article was finished, Trump had fired five inspectors general; Sanger and Savage, 2020.)

By the end of July, there were 4 million confirmed cases, the most in the world (a fourth of the global total), while the number of deaths was one third the number of U.S. losses in World War I, and

exceeded the number of U.S. dead in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq (author's calculations based on Wikipedia). In two days in May, the president changed his mind. First, he declared victory over the pandemic and said he was going to close down the national pandemic task force.¹³ The following day, because of the outpouring of criticism following his announcement, he declared he had discovered how popular the task force was. He had decided to keep it, but change its objective: it would no longer focus on the pandemic, but on reopening the economy. What did not change was his intention to prioritize his reelection over the massive number of deaths of U.S. citizens. To leave no room for doubt, the task force had worked out a detailed plan of advisable precautions for the reopening process and the White House rejected it, alleging it was too prescriptive and could harm the economy and violate religious freedom (the precautions included social distancing in churches). In mid-June, the task force ceased its daily television appearances, since Trump did not want Fauci to continue giving figures on the increase in infections.

In his May 12 Senate¹⁴ statement, Fauci warned:

"My concern that if some areas -- cities, states or what have you -- jump over those various checkpoints and prematurely open up, without having the capability of being able to respond effectively and efficiently, my concern is we will start to see little spikes that might turn into outbreaks ... There is a real risk that you will trigger an outbreak that you may not be able to control, which in fact, paradoxically, will set you back, not only leading to some suffering and death that could be avoided but could even set you back on the road to try to get economic recovery" (Stolberg, 2020a).

Libertarian Republican Senator Rand Paul questioned the reliability of the pandemic predictive models and argued it would be a mistake not to open the schools, lashing out at Fauci, "I don't think you're the one person that gets to make the decision." Fauci replied, "we should be 'humble' about what we don't know... I'm a scientist... I don't give advice about economic things, I don't give advice about anything other than public health" (Stolberg, 2020a). He then admonished those who believed that children are completely immune to the pandemic, and referred to the inflammatory syndrome that has killed some children and afflicted hundreds, suggesting that reopening the schools would increase such a risk. Lastly, he asserted it would be illusory for schools to expect a coronavirus vaccine or treatment that would allow students to return to their classrooms in the fall, since it would take at least a year to develop. Trump, enraged, declared that Fauci's words of caution were "not an acceptable answer" and that the expert wanted to "play all sides of the equation" (Rogers, 2020a). In mid-April, Trump had sent out a tweet calling for the firing of Fauci, but later played it down.¹⁵ Risking a further expansion of the virus as new infections were rising in most states, in July, Trump pressured governors and mayors for a reopening of all schools in August, and threatened to withdraw federal aid if they failed to comply. His objective was to stimulate the economy (confining children at home prevents their parents from returning to work) and thus further his reelection chances, regardless of infections and deaths (Baker and Green, 2020). Several school districts, particularly in California, refused the order. And yet, at the end of July, under strong pressure from the president, the CDC agreed to school reopenings, although they issued a set of recommendations to maximize security among students. Despite Trump's assertion that children have a fraction of the chance of getting infected that adults do, in the last two weeks of July, the number of child infections jumped by 90%, with 97,000 new cases, and this was before the full reopening (Barron, 2020).

On May 26, Memorial Day, the beaches and lakes were jammed with people who were not wearing masks or social distancing. Security personnel were unable to prevent this because most states had no set of mandatory precautions. Later, the authorities asked the people to voluntarily self-quarantine for 14 days, a request that was obviously ineffective. The Republican National Convention (RNC) was going to be held in Charlotte, North Carolina, in August. The state's

Democratic governor warned that because of the pandemic, there would be limits on the number of attendees, who would have to wear masks. Trump threatened that if the governor could not guarantee a total exemption from these restrictions, he would move the event to another state. Immediately, the governor of Florida offered his state as a venue. “Florida would love to have the R.N.C. Heck, I am a Republican it would be good for us to have the [convention], in terms of [its] economic impact” (Astor, 2020), he said, discarding any potential health concerns. Trump decided to hold the convention in Jacksonville, the capital of the state, which has been experiencing an increase in new cases.¹⁶ Trump’s political rallies in Oklahoma and Arizona attracted thousands of people without precautionary measures and led to new outbreaks.¹⁷ The fourth of July celebrations were cancelled in most of the country, but Trump organized a fireworks display at Mt. Rushmore, South Dakota, to bring together thousands of people, with no obligation to use masks or socially distance. The sculptor of the huge faces of the four presidents portrayed on the mountain had links to the Ku Klux Klan and special effects projected the face of the egomaniac Trump alongside the other four (Fausset et al., 2020; Bernard, 2020; Karni, 2020).

In a complete about-face, in a televised address on July 21, Trump acknowledged (after six months of denial) that covid-19 would probably get worse before it got better. Furthermore, he suggested using masks, which he had previously mocked as innocuous or even harmful, and asserted that he had used masks before and would continue to do so, a shocking distortion of the truth. Two days later, the president abruptly cancelled the Republican Convention in Florida (Karni et al., 2020). The evidence from countries that adopted restrictive measures earlier than the U.S. and began to reopen their economies much more cautiously is cause for concern, because by mid-May, new outbreaks had occurred in Germany, China, South Korea, and Spain (Bloomberg News; RTVE, 2020). On the other hand, at the end of May, the number of new coronavirus cases was going down in 14 states, stable in 28, and going up in 8. This was the result of the lockdown and social distancing that had been in effect for practically two months (44% of all Americans self-isolated at home). Various projections were made on the increase in new deaths due to reopening in the U.S. The University of Pennsylvania projected that accumulated national deaths, even with restrictions, would grow from 90,000 in mid-May to 157,000 at the end of July, while with no restrictions, the death toll would reach 300,000. Another projection based partially on data from the CDC indicated that the number of deaths would climb from a total of 60,000 to 134,000 (Foster and Mundell, 2020). On August 11, 163,000 covid-19-related deaths had been reported. The addition of deaths listed as having other causes, but which were actually attributable to the coronavirus, provides a figure in excess of 200,000 deaths. The dire predictions had been confirmed, even before schools reopened.

A serious problem is that only between 7 and 17% of the population has been infected and is probably immune, but a level of immunity of at least 60-70% is necessary to avoid a new outbreak (Popovich and Sanger-Katz, 2020). An AP poll showed that 60% of the population supported staying at home except for essential needs (Mervosh and Harmon, 2020). Most of the states that reopened quickly, without a prior drop in the number of cases, such as Alabama, Arizona, California, North Carolina, Florida, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Texas and Utah, had Republican governors; the numbers of infections there continued to increase (Bosman et al., 2020). In general, the Democratic states of the Middle West and East reopened slowly, after having met the scientific criteria, while Republican states, especially in the South, reopened earlier, and most of them did so without meeting the criteria. The experts had warned of a new outbreak that could be potentially worse than in the countries previously cited, which reopened before the U.S., but with many more prior restrictions. In the first week of June, the number of cases worldwide passed seven million, with 136,000 new cases detected in a single day, the largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic (Santora, 2020). At the beginning of July, new cases in the U.S. were going up in 36 states and their number shot up by 80% over a two-week period. Every 10 infected people spread the virus to 80 people (Stolberg and Weiland, 2020b).

Confronted with a rise in new cases and deaths, Trump first branded the figures as “exaggerated” and “inflated,” arguing it was a fraud perpetrated by the Democrats to harm his reelection chances (on the contrary, the overwhelming majority of health experts worldwide, including Fauci, affirmed that the number of new cases and deaths was underestimated). In a statement to Congress at the end of June, Fauci reported on spikes in the epidemic in more than half the country, while Trump continued to insist it was going to disappear, a point the epidemiologist denied in his testimony. Other experts testified about the need to increase the number of tests, deemed insufficient, as well as to contact trace, in order to control the expansion of the virus (Stolberg and Weiland, 2020a). In the face of such statements from the scientific community, the president changed tactics, following the perverse example of the governor of Florida (the new epicenter of the pandemic) by hiding or manipulating the statistics and firing the civil servants who might contradict him. In a June tweet, Trump asserted: “If you don’t test, you don’t have any cases. If we stop testing right now, we’d have very few cases, if any.” In his speech reopening his reelection campaign, the president said that he had told his people to stop giving out information about covid-19 cases. Fauci retorted that the additional infections were responsible for the increase (Stolberg and Weiland, 2020a). This was confirmed by an analysis that showed that there had been a 215% increase nationwide in the number of cases from the start of June to the end of July, while testing had grown by an average of only 80%. The difference between the two figures made up the actual increase: 135% (Conlen, 2020). The worst part of Trump’s dissembling, aimed at giving the impression that the pandemic was under control, was his order that hospitals stop reporting cases and deaths to the CDC, and pass that data directly to the Department of Health and Human Services, headed by a trusted presidential appointee, which would not be obliged to reveal the data to the public. Due to the enormous criticism that his order provoked, Trump rescinded it the following day (Stolberg, 2020d).¹⁸ Trump’s disastrous pandemic performance has led some prominent Republicans (among them McConnell) to oppose him and support the use of masks and social distancing, accept Fauci’s advice, and acknowledge that the virus will not disappear until a safe and effective vaccine is discovered (Burns et al, 2020).

The laboratory Moderna, with one billion dollars in federal aid, announced in May that it was testing a vaccine that could be ready at the end of 2020, but scientists were concerned that the rush to market might compromise its effectiveness or that it might be harmful (Grady, 2020). In June, Fauci promised the U.S. Congress that he would not permit a vaccine to go to market without having first verified its safety and effectiveness (Stolberg and Weiland, 2020b). An expert panel interviewed at the end of June cautioned that the vaccine would take at least 18 months (Mukherjee, 2020). Trump, however, has repeatedly asserted that the vaccine would be discovered in record time and that it would not be necessary to complete all the trials. The head of the Food and Drug Administration, Dr. Stephen Hahn, a big donor to Trump and the Republican party, who has \$10 million invested in the Sanofi company that is working on another vaccine, promptly declared that he could grant the vaccine emergency approval (LaFraniere, 2020b).

4. Fishing in Troubled Waters: The Beneficiaries of the Pandemic

Former President Barack Obama branded Trump’s covid-19 performance an absolute, chaotic disaster because it was based on a rationale of “what’s in it for me” and “to heck with everybody else” (Zeleny, 2020). There are numerous examples of the Funnel Law double standard for the president and his family. Precisely when the first stimulus package passed, Trump refused to promise that his own company would not benefit from it (Derysh, 2020). He has promoted an anti-malarial medication (hydroxychloroquine) as a covid-19 prophylactic, although there is abundant evidence of its ineffectiveness.¹⁹ Even worse, it is very risky for people with heart, kidney or liver ailments. More than 40,000 health professionals prescribed the medication to 90% of the population requesting it, which caused sales to increase 46-fold, all of which led to a worldwide shortage of the drug and left millions of malaria, lupus and rheumatoid arthritis patients defenseless (Gabler and

Keller, 2020). Trump later reported he was taking the medication; he was criticized by doctors and rebuked for being irresponsible (Karni and Thomas, 2020).²⁰ It was reported that the president had stock in the pharmaceutical company making the medicine (Dicker, 2020). Trump also brokered an agreement among the world's major oil producers to reverse the price slide brought about by the pandemic. This agreement does not benefit U.S. consumers, but rather, the oil industry, 90% of whose contributions go to the president and the Republican Party (Krauss, 2020). His son, Eric Trump, who oversees The Trump Organization's luxurious Trump International Hotel, situated in a federally owned building, used his influence to request a reduction in the monthly rent (Dzhanova, 2020).²¹ Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and key adviser, organized a shadow team to obtain masks, ventilators and disinfectants, in order to send them to the president's friends and powerful allies. Such intervention interfered with the mandate given to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which had been tasked with sending those products to the neediest states and hospitals (Collman, 2020). Rick Bright, director of the Department of Health and Human Services' Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, reported that he had been fired for criticizing Trump's promotion of hydroxychloroquine and for opposing political pressure to award lucrative contracts to companies belonging to Kushner's friends (Stolberg, 2020b). The president and his son-in-law benefited from a little-known program from the first stimulus package that retroactively granted breaks on taxes paid before covid-19 to real estate magnates: 82% of the fund went to those who make more than a million dollars a year. Another tax cut favored corporations with over 25 million dollars in gross receipts. From the beginning of the economic crisis in mid-March through mid-May, the wealth of America's billionaires grew by 15%, with 16 new billionaires joining that exclusive club (Kristof, 2020a). A federal judge has allowed a suit against Trump, his three sons and his company, which claims they fraudulently enriched themselves by swindling poor, vulnerable people who invested in one of their dirty businesses (Orden, 2020).

Republican millionaire and Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos used 30 billion dollars from the first stimulus package aimed at public schools, especially in poor neighborhoods, to help private schools and universities in affluent areas. On the other hand, she blocked debt forgiveness for students who had been cheated by universities (Green, 2020). The Chairman of the Intelligence Committee, Richard Burr, sold about 1.7 million dollars in stock just before giving a frightening speech on the virus and a fall in the stock market. Republican Senator Kelly Loefflers and her husband (both multimillionaires and Republican donors) did the same after receiving confidential information from health officials regarding the seriousness of the virus (Lipton and Fandos, 2020; Haberman et al., 2020). About a hundred major corporations took out loans designed for small businesses, with no obligation to pay them back (see the next section), among them, Ashford Inc., the luxury hotel chain that owns the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Atlanta, which pocketed 40 million dollars, and the Ruth's Chris Steak House chain, which received 20 million dollars (Smialek et al., 2020a). Conversely, most small business owners who requested loans were left out, especially Afro-Americans and Hispanics. This inequality caused the fund to run dry in only 13 days and additional funds had to be allocated to refill its coffers (Flitter, 2020). Treasury Secretary Mnuchin warned dishonest corporations that they should return the loans or suffer the legal consequences, but the corporations have challenged him and have even revealed to their shareholders that they had other credit resources available, in violation of the loan eligibility standards (Rappeport and McCabe, 2020). The big banks gave preference to their clients having a minimum of 25 million dollars in their accounts, allowing them to obtain loans intended for small businesses more easily than regular clients. All of Chases' millionaire clients got loans, while only 7% of their regular client base did (Flitter and Cowley, 2020). In addition, the banks continued to pay their shareholders dividends, a practice that had caused some large banks to go bankrupt in 2008. (Restrictions on dividend payments had been imposed in 2009 to avoid a repetition of the problem, but the government subsequently eased them, and the banks took advantage of these looser restrictions.) A federal fund aimed at preventing hospitals from going bankrupt because of the pandemic, assigned more than \$5

billion dollars to twenty large national hospitals (with a majority of private patients). One recipient of this federal largesse was the Providence Health System hospital chain that received \$509 million despite having nearly \$12 billion in cash, which it invests in the stock market, generating abundant profits. (The lobbyists drafted the criteria to ensure that most of the money would go to wealthy hospitals). On the other hand, hospitals with scarce reserves that work with poor patients who are uninsured or on Medicaid received half as much financial assistance through the program (Drucker et al., 2020). The HCA hospital chain, one of the richest in the world, with \$7 billion dollars in profits and a value of \$36 billion, received \$1 billion in federal stimulus funds and paid \$26 million to its chief executive, at the same time it failed to provide protective equipment to its health personal and threatened to fire them if they did not accept a wage freeze and other concessions (Silver-Greenberg et al., 2020). The hospitals in the poorest areas of New York City, with higher rates of infection from the virus, have the least number of beds per capita, lack equipment, advanced medications and endure the highest mortality rates. The opposite is true in the wealthiest private hospitals (Rosenthal et al., 2020). The largest private health insurance companies had profits of between \$2 billion and \$6.7 billion in the second quarter of 2020, due to the postponement of non-urgent surgeries (Abelson, 2020). The cruise ship industry continued sending off cruises after receiving a warning from the CDC not to set sail and after being made aware of new cases and deaths on their ships, which it kept secret. (Estimates are that there were at least 2,592 cases [922 among crew] and 65 deaths [11 among crew] on 54 ships.) (“Cruise Ships...,” 2020). Cotton farmers have received federal subsidies equivalent to 33 times what they lost in the Trump tariff wars;²² some farmers got millions of dollars in subsidies in spite of a \$250,000 limit. The \$28 billion paid out to farmers because of covid-19 have been concentrated in states that are key to Trump’s reelection (LaFraniere, 2020a). Some Republican operatives sold millions of dollars of covid-19 supplies to states and municipalities, but they never delivered them and have been sued. A \$45 million fraud involved the sale of seven million masks with a 400% markup over list price (Rashbaum, 2020). These cases of robbery, fraud, corruption and greed have set an example for amoral people, who hoarded toilet paper and other products, while market prices for ventilators, masks and disinfectants went up exorbitantly (in some cases, as much as 1,662%). A group of international fraudsters stole thousands of worker social security numbers and embezzled millions of dollars that had been set aside for the unemployed (M. Baker, 2020).

The rhetoric that “we are all facing the virus together” has not been confirmed in practice. In New York, almost half a million people left for properties in locations with fewer cases of the virus. The highest 1% income bracket made up the overwhelming majority of those who escaped, while an enormous majority of those whose incomes were in the lower 80% of the economic pie stayed behind (Quealy, 2020).

5. The Stimulus Packages: The Democratic Battle to Make them More Equitable

As this article was finished, the U.S. Congress had passed two stimulus packages. The first totaled \$2.3 billion, almost three times the 2009 stimulus package to deal with the Great Recession. Initially, this package was focused on aiding the big companies. It was the Democrats in both houses who fought to get funding for the unemployed, small businesses, hospitals, health workers, food aid and a greater amount in individual payments for millions of U.S. citizens. They also demanded supervision in the distribution of the funds to avoid their being used to increase executive pay or for stock repurchases, as occurred with the 2009 package. Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren protested, “We’re not here to create a slush fund for Donald Trump and his family, or a slush fund for the Treasury Department to be able to hand out to their friends” (Derysh, 2020). Mitch McConnell accused the opposition of engaging in political games and Trump urged his party to reject the Democratic proposals and make a quick decision. Republicans such as the multi-millionaire Senator from Florida, Rick Scott, opposed the payment of \$600 a week to the unemployed in addition to their state unemployment subsidies, alleging that such payments would

be a disincentive for the unemployed to return to work.²³ The urgency of passing a package and a temporary withdrawal from the negotiations by the Democrats won them some concessions. Even so, most of the aid was channeled to the large corporations and there were many problems: 22% was granted to these corporations in the form of subsidized loans; 13% in a single \$1,200 dollar payment to citizens who earn less than a certain income level (the delivery of that payment was held up because Trump ordered that his name appear on checks, as if he had paid for them, a brazen example of electioneering); 11% went to small business loans (only 26% of small businesses received them, the biggest slice having gone to the big corporations, as indicated above); 11% of the funds went to the unemployed (this program ended at the end of July, but see later); 6% was distributed to states and municipalities (who bear the brunt of the fight against the virus), and 5% went to the hospitals facing the pandemic (obviously insufficient) (CARES Act, 2020; Cochane and Fandos, 2020). The neediest did not receive aid, either because such aid was not directed at them or because they were unaware it existed or how to fill out the applications.

Afro-American and Hispanic small business owners have been more harmed by the economic crisis than their white counterparts: 41% of Afro-American small businesses, 32% of Hispanic small businesses, and 17% of white small businesses closed, reflecting the fact that Afro-Americans and Hispanics work in the industries or occupations most hard hit by the covid-19 lockdown and the economic crisis, such as restaurants and transportation. Furthermore, Afro-American and Hispanic small businesses have less capital and consequently, ran out of cash more quickly. In addition, these two groups benefitted less from the stimulus packages: only 12% of Afro-Americans and Hispanics received the funds they applied for, as opposed to half of all small businesses generally (Leatherby, 2020). Breaking all of his previous records for fallaciousness, Trump asserted in July 2020 that he was the president that had done most for “black America,” with the *possible* exception of Abraham Lincoln. A journalist asked Trump if he also did more than President Lyndon B. Johnson, who promoted the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Trump answered in the affirmative.

The first stimulus package soon proved insufficient. A second package totaling \$484 billion was approved to assist small businesses, hospitals and aid in virus testing, the latter two areas having been promoted by the Democrats. In May, House Democrats passed a third package totaling three trillion dollars, including one trillion in aid to states and municipalities and the rest for another individual payment to taxpayers, extra payments to the unemployed and food assistance. Jerome Powell, head of the Federal Reserve, backed the need for such a package to avoid irreparable harm to the economy and unemployment,²⁴ adding that it was up to Congress because the Federal Reserve had already done all it could (Smialek et al., 2020b). The Republicans were opposed. Trump said he was not willing to help states governed by Democrats and indicated he would veto the package, and Republican Senator Scott questioned why states that were financially well off should help those with fiscal problems. Nevertheless, the former presidential candidate and moderate Utah Republican Senator Mitt Romney shot back that it was not only the states who voted Democratic that had problems, since there were states that had voted Republican and were suffering severely, such as Louisiana, Kansas and Kentucky. The sharp drop in the stock market in March (the Dow plummeted 2,000 points) put further pressure on the Republicans to pass a third stimulus package. In May, McConnell declared he would not push through a third package unless it incorporated a clause exempting the federal government and businesses from liability in case the reopening increased the number of deaths because of the pandemic (Wilkinson, 2020). At the beginning of July, faced with new outbreaks of the pandemic and Powell’s urging that a third stimulus package was needed, the Republicans came up with a \$1 billion package to counter the \$3 billion Democratic proposal. The plans differed in their measures and degrees of equity. The Republicans wanted a moratorium on the capital gains tax, a reduction in the payroll tax paid by employers, more deductions for corporative expenses on meals and entertainment, and limits on business liability. The Democrats, on the other hand, demanded aid for states and municipalities, an extension of the \$600 payment to the

unemployed (rejected once again by the Republicans) and other social programs. Trump did not get involved in the stimulus package debate and the Republican senators went on vacation without agreeing on a package with the Democrats (Rappeport and Smialek, 2020).

Before departing for vacation, the Republicans cut the enhanced unemployment benefit from \$600 to \$200 a week and rejected Trump's requests of \$1.75 billion for a new FBI building (the current headquarters are one block from Trump's Washington D.C. hotel) and a suspension of the payroll tax. The president criticized that proposal, boycotted the conversations and said that he would only support a second payment for all U.S. citizens because he did not care about the rest (Cochrane and Tankersley, 2020). Surprisingly, in August, Trump enacted a confusing executive order of dubious legality: allowing companies to defer payroll taxes for Americans making less than \$100,000 a year from Sept. 1 through Dec. 31., The measure had been rejected by both parties and denounced by the U.S. National Academy of Social Insurance as an attempt to dismantle social security pensions and Medicare, programs that the president had promised to protect (NASI, 2020). Another order extended the enhanced unemployment benefit, but only in the amount of \$400 (\$300 financed by the federal government and \$100 by the states, which lack the funds to do it). The order excluded aid to states and municipalities, and for reopening schools and small businesses. According to the Constitution, all the orders require congressional approval, and hence were mostly in limbo (Cochrane et al., 2020; Liber and Cowley, 2020). As this article was finished, there was debate on whether Congress would interrupt its recess to come back and approve a proper package with the needed funds. The inequitable distribution of earlier stimulus package funds has been proven: states with small populations and few cases got a very large share of the pie (Hawaii, \$2 million for every positive case, Alaska, \$3.4 million), while big states with more cases had received very small portions (New York, \$24,000 per case, and New Jersey, \$27,000) (Mulvihill, 2020). The first package prohibited Trump and his family, the vice president, and congresspersons from receiving aid from the fund. Congress set up various committees to oversee spending within the CARES Act. Among them were the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC), made up of inspectors general from a minimum of nine federal agencies, with responsibility for overseeing expenditures from the entire bill. Another was the Congressional Oversight Commission, with four members (two from each party) and a chairperson agreed to by the speaker of the House and the Senate majority leader, with responsibility for overseeing economic stability efforts by the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve Board (Gode, 2020).

On March 30, 2020, Glenn Fine was appointed to be Chair of the PRAC. On April 7, 2020, Trump removed Fine, who was acting inspector general for the Defense Department and who had "earned a reputation for aggressive independence." Fine's removal as acting inspector general made him ineligible to chair the PRAC. (Savage and Baker, 2020; Pandemic Response Accountability Committee, Wikipedia). The Congressional Oversight Commission has issued reports, but still has no chairperson. According to Commission member Donna Shalala, "We've been producing first class reports. But it's killing us...We need a chair, and we need to hire staff" (Broadwater, 2020). Lacking any supervision, it's no surprise that Trump, his family, and his friends have unduly benefitted from the stimulus package, as proven in this article.

6. Trumpian Triage in Theory and Practice

At times of serious disasters or disease, triage is used to maximize insufficient resources, prioritizing patients according to their level of need while factoring in the degree of probability that they will benefit from treatment or survive. Theoretically, with covid-19, the decision of who has access to tests, ventilators and intensive care units should be objective and ethical, never influenced by wealth, race, power, gender, age or connections, but in a Trumpian world that disdains the poor, the disabled, women, the elderly, Afro-Americans, Hispanics and immigrants, these are precisely the criteria employed.²⁵ Politicians, businessmen and celebrities have gotten immediate access to covid-19

tests, including Congressmen Mario Díaz-Balart and Rand Paul, through the taxpayer-funded office that provides medical attention exclusively to Congresspersons in Washington. (Paul had the audacity to fail to self-isolate before knowing the test results.) The mayors of the City of Miami and Miami-Dade County and their wives enjoyed this same prerogative at the expense of infected people who desperately needed the test. There are also disparities among the powerful: while the president, the vice president, the White House staff and Trump's visitors are tested daily for the virus, with rapid access to results, in the Senate only those who show signs of infection can be tested.

According to New York City statistics, Hispanics and Afro-Americans are three times more likely than whites to get infected by the virus and twice as likely to succumb to it (Oppei et al., 2020). Hispanics represent 34% of the coronavirus-related deaths in the city while they make up only 29% of its population; Afro-Americans make up 22% of the city's population and 28% of its coronavirus fatalities. It's worse in Washington, D.C. where Afro-Americans comprise 50% of the population, but 80% of the dead, and the pattern is similar in Maryland and Michigan (Steinhauer, 2020). The reasons are obvious: they suffer from greater poverty, economic disparities (below average income, poor housing and malnourishment), a greater proportion of them work in high-risk occupations (transportation, cleaning, food), they have less access to health care and a greater proportion of chronic disease. While private hospitals have large reserves and political contacts to get equipment quickly, the hospitals that treat the neediest are lacking the most basic equipment. In the first three months of the pandemic, the elderly were the most affected and had the highest levels of mortality from the virus, but with the reopening in the summer, the panorama changed, and people aged 22-44 registered the highest number of new infections, since this group frequented bars, restaurants and stores (often without masking or social distancing), while the seniors continued to self-isolate and protected themselves much more (Bosman and Mervosh, 2020). It has been reported that the virus affects men more than women, but most health workers are female nurses, and this group is more exposed. The economic crisis also affects lower-income households more: 39% of households earning \$40,000 or less a year lost their jobs, versus 13% of those who were making \$100,000 or more (Smialek, 2020a). Another ominous consequence of the crisis in the U.S. is the increase in malnutrition among the poor because of the scarce access to food banks faced with rising demand. A Brookings Institution poll found that 1/5 of mothers with children complain that they do not get enough food, three times as many as in 2008 at the height of the Great Recession, but the Republicans are dead set against expanding the food stamps program. The first rescue package in March included a program to provide food to children who had lost meals because of school closures, but two months later only 15% of them had received the food and 16 states lacked federal approval for the program (DeParle, 2020a, 2020b). The pandemic has also led to an avalanche of evictions, because the unemployed cannot pay the rent on their homes and have been put out on the street, increasing the number of homeless (Mervosh, 2020). Various southern states have adopted protocols allowing them to suspend ventilator treatment for the disabled. Another disparity exists between predominantly urban states (with high levels of viral infection) and rural states. Republican governors from Arkansas, North and South Dakota, Iowa and Nebraska did not take measures against covid-19 because they thought they would not be affected. One of their governors declared that the measures would violate individual liberties and that sparse settlement in rural areas would act as a shield. On April 10, three quarters of all rural countries were already infected and were suffering from a serious shortage of hospitals, equipment, and personnel to take on the pandemic.

7. People's Reaction to Trump's Failed Covid-19 Policy and Impact on his Reelection

With copious evidence, this article demonstrates Trump's direct responsibility for more than 5 million covid-19 cases and more than 170,000 deaths from covid-19 in the U.S. He minimized the severity of the pandemic and he took months to react despite having information, studies, and expert advice. He only acted when the stock market plunged, threatening his reelection. He neither designed nor applied a nation-wide federal plan that, with the aid of epidemiologists, could order the

mandatory shutting down of establishments, quarantining of people, the use of masks, disinfectants and social distancing, as well as massive testing and contact tracing. On the contrary, he fought the states, and criticized various governors who were pioneers in imposing restrictions before subsequently saddling them with the responsibility for dealing with the pandemic. (He did so despite having declared that he had total power over the states.) Along with the vice president, he set a bad example for the population, by refusing to use a mask in his television appearances and public visits. He also talked up a medication that he asserted, against all scientific evidence, was effective in preventing the virus and suggested taking or injecting oneself with disinfectant to avoid covid, without being concerned about the harmful effects such advice could have on the population. Trump and his followers adhered to social Darwinism. Faced with a choice between death and the economy, they supported the latter without caring about the terrible effects that would have on the people, especially among the elderly, whose death was justified as a necessary sacrifice for the good of the economy. The stimulus packages were inequitable. The Republicans obstructed measures to aid the unemployed and the ethnic groups hardest hit by the virus and the economic crisis. Trump, his family, friends and Republican allies took advantage of the stimulus funds to increase their wealth. Worried by the fall in stock market prices and high unemployment, the president urged governors to reopen their states even though in most of them, the virus curve was moving upward. A miniscule percentage of the population had been affected by the virus, but there was no order for massive testing and contact tracing, and no guarantee that there were sufficient ventilators and intensive care beds in the hospitals. This decision flew in the face of expert warnings that an early reopening would generate a resurgence of the virus and a worse economic crisis than at the outset. Both Trump and the vice president used multiple ploys to deny that the reopening had caused new outbreaks in most states. As part of his reelection campaign, Trump convened massive Republican rallies, which led to an increase in new cases and deaths, and this did not stop him from pursuing his fateful campaign. For months during this national tragedy, Trump never showed empathy for those afflicted with the virus and their families. On the contrary, he promoted hatred and national division, attacking all those he perceived as enemies and blaming opponents and the media for his own mistakes.

Discarding prior evidence, with his habitual arrogance, Trump boasted that the American people thought he had done a great job managing the virus and told critics to look at the polls. After the initial measures in mid-March, Americans behaved as usual in terrible crises: support for Trump rose from 44% to 47-52%. Nevertheless, this is much less than the 90% that approved of George W. Bush after 9-11, the 89% approval rating enjoyed by George Bush during the war against Iraq, the 87% of the population that supported Harry Truman at the end of World War II, or the 85% supporting Franklin D. Roosevelt after entering the war. Higher percentages of the population (between 75% and 79%) support the leaders of Austria, Denmark, Holland, and New Zealand, which took early measures, allowing them to safely reopen their economies. Furthermore, in mid-April, Trump's approval rating slid to 46% for two reasons, one related to the economy and one being the president's attitude. Among the former: the warning by the managing director of the IMF that this crisis would be worse than the 2007-2008 crisis, the 9.7% drop in GDP during the second quarter of 2020 and the rise in unemployment, which Federal Reserve Chairman Powell said would remain high for years.²⁶ It was predicted that the economy would shrink by 7.3% in 2020 if the virus was contained and by 8.5% if it was not; the annualized rate of decline in mid-year was 33% (Smialek and Rappeport, 2020). The second reason was the president's daily television appearances, in which he criticized governors and mayors who held different opinions from his and increased the country's polarization instead of trying to achieve unity in the face of a common danger. He fired the inspector general that had just been appointed to supervise the stimulus package. He praised himself, boasting of high TV ratings in the middle of an increasing death rate. He made factual mistakes. He constantly contradicted himself or issued retractions and made foolish remarks that revealed his vast ignorance, such as saying that he had averted billions of deaths in the U.S., a country that only has

330 million inhabitants. Other such remarks were dangerous, as when he suggested people take or inject themselves with disinfectants that would go to the lungs and kill the virus.²⁷

An important question is how Trump's deplorable performance in dealing with the pandemic and the peaceful protests over the murder of an Afro-American by Minnesota police (see below) will affect his reelection (66% of the population disapproves of the way in which the president managed these crises). Four surveys in the first half of April (before Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren announced their support for Joe Biden showed that Biden would beat Trump by 11 points, which increased to 13 points if one took the pandemic into consideration. The projected margin of victory was 20 points among middle class voters. At the beginning of June, various polls showed Biden maintaining an 11-point lead, while keeping a 13-point edge regarding the handling of the pandemic. Biden had a 20-point lead among whites with a college degree and a 25-point lead among women. Trump dismissed as false a CNN poll that placed him 14 points below Biden and demanded, unsuccessfully, that the poll be withdrawn (Russonello, 2020; Burns and Haberman, 2020; Cohn, 2020a; Grynbaum and Haberman, 2020). At the end of June, a poll by the ultraconservative Fox News gave Trump only 38% of the vote, versus 50% for Biden (Blanton, 2020), while a New York Times poll split 36% for Trump and 50% for Biden due to Trump's terrible handling of the pandemic and the peaceful anti-racism protests (Biden had 79% of the Afro-American vote, 64% of the Hispanic vote, 59% of voters aged 18-34, 55% of women's votes, and 52% of those 65 and over; Burns et al., 2020). Lastly, *The Economist* (2020) projected Biden would win 337 electoral votes (270 are required to win the presidency), giving the Democratic candidate an 86% chance of victory as opposed to 14% odds of winning for Trump, "the greatest margin of victory since Barack Obama's victory in 2008." Trump has dismissed all these polls and predictions as false, as they were in 2016—he argues—but Biden's winning margin is in the double digits, greater than Hillary Clinton's. (Rogers, 2020). Various prominent Republicans, such as former President George W. Bush, former Secretary of State Colin Powell, former presidential candidate and current Senator Mitt Romney, the widow of former presidential candidate and Senator John McCain, Trump's former Secretary of Defense James Mattis and various high-ranking military figures, have indicated they have serious reservations about voting for Trump, and some have announced they will vote for Biden (Martin, 2020b). According to the polls, the Republican candidates for the Senate are behind their Democratic opponents, even in the states that Trump won in 2016 (Cohn, 2020b). Before, Republicans slavishly supported Trump because otherwise, they could lose the elections; now they are worried that a drop in popular support for the president may be an obstacle to keep their seats. A poll taken at the end of June indicated that 6% of those who voted for Trump in the most fiercely contested states in 2016 would not do so in 2020. Between 78% and 86% felt that Biden would be a better president because he would do a better job uniting the nation, he would be better for racial relations and would handle the pandemic better (Cain et al., 2020).

Another question is whether an eventual economic recovery will be quick enough and strong enough to help the president. A growing number of economists believe that, even if there were to be a quick reopening without a second wave of the virus, the recovery would be slow and fluctuating. This view was supported in May by the Federal Reserve Chair Powell: "This economy will recover [but]... It may take a period of time, it could stretch through the end of next year, we really don't know" (Smialek, 2020b). The Congressional Budget Office projected that full recovery could take years, assuming growth would return in 2020. In July, after the Trump-sponsored reopening and subsequent new outbreaks, Powell issued a more pessimistic prediction: "A full recovery is unlikely until people are confident that it is safe to re-engage in a broad range of activities," Mr. Powell told a House committee, adding that a second wave "could force people to withdraw" and "undermine public confidence..." To this end, a third stimulus package is urgently needed (Stolberg and

Weiland, 2020b). The precipitous reopening is sparking national outbreaks of the virus with adverse consequences for health and the economy, as well as for Trump's reelection chances.

Former Vice President Biden has warned that if Trump believes he will lose the election, he could postpone it or resort to any ruse to win it (Cillizza, 2020). A team at Georgetown University has studied various scenarios for such trickery (Epstein, 2020). The first scenario is that Trump might prohibit voting by mail because, he claims, it would lead to "the most rigged election in our nation's history." In a precedent-setting move, Twitter labelled this assertion false, which led Trump to threaten to regulate or close down social media for violating his freedom of "expression" (meaning the freedom to lie with impunity). He immediately issued a probably illegal executive order eliminating the protection Twitter enjoyed against lawsuits seeking damages. Since 2012, Trump has cited electoral fraud in 713 instances, especially during the 2016 campaign and the first eight months of 2020 (Baker, 2020f). Questioned on whether he believed that the 2020 election would be rigged, Attorney General William Barr (who supports Trump unconditionally) affirmed that a massive vote by mail would substantially increase the risk of fraud (LaFraniere and Qiu, 2020). The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that mail-in ballots sent in during the Wisconsin spring elections in the midst of the pandemic could not be received and valid up until six days past Election Day, an arrangement that had been approved by the presiding federal judge. Trump falsely claimed that voting by mail in Michigan and Nevada was illegal and threatened not to send federal pandemic aid to those states (Wines, 2020). Furthermore, not only did he refuse to save the U.S. Postal Service from bankruptcy (Democrats have proposed \$25 billion in emergency funding to support the service); he has politicized it. The president appointed postal chief Louis DeJoy, a Republican who donated \$1.5 million to his campaign in 2016 (DeJoy's wife has stock in UPS, the post office's main competitor) and seeks to privatize the service. DeJoy also suspended overtime payments to carriers and committed other acts of sabotage (Shear and Vogel, 2020). A variation of this first scenario is that if the majority of the voting takes place by mail because of fear of the pandemic, the counting of the votes might be delayed (the envelopes have to be opened manually and the votes scanned, which delays the process); in those states where the vote count is very close, the delay might be even greater and Trump might take advantage of this to claim there had been fraud (Goldmacher, 2020).

A second ploy would be for Attorney General Barr to announce a criminal investigation into Joseph Biden, which would lead some people to vote against him and could delay the election. The third scenario would be for Trump to declare a state of emergency, turn to the National Guard, and prevent meetings with ten or more people. In June, following the murder of the Afro-American George Floyd by a Minneapolis (Minnesota) policeman and the subsequent multitudinous demonstrations throughout the country, the vast majority of which were peaceful, including those in Washington, D.C., Trump declared, "When the looting starts, the shooting starts" (His security team had locked him into the White House bunker for his safety, and the next day they surrounded the area with a wall and other obstacles.) Afterwards, Trump issued an ultimatum to governors and mayors: if they didn't put an end to the protests, he would send in the military to do it. At the same time, he ordered the National Guard to attack the peaceful demonstrators who had surrounded the White House, using chemical irritants and flare grenades. This allowed him to leave his residence and walk to a historic church located nearby, where he was photographed holding a Bible. The ultimatum was widely criticized as a violation of both the Constitution and democracy—including the Episcopal bishop of the church where Trump had photos taken of him holding a Bible—54% of the people supported the demonstrators while 22% were opposed (Kristof, 2020b; Senior, 2020). In July, Trump dispatched federal troops in combat gear, without identity badges, to put down peaceful demonstrators in Portland, using tear gas, wounding some, and arresting many more. The governor portrayed this action as "a flagrant abuse of power" and "an attack on our democracy" (Olmos, et al., 2020). Trump boasted that the federal troops had done "a fantastic job," falsely accused the peaceful demonstrators of being "leftist radicals" and "anarchists," said that if Biden won the election the country would

“go to hell,” and announced that he would send troops to crack down on protesters in other cities run by Democrats, such as Chicago, New York, Detroit and Philadelphia (Baker et al., 2020).

A fourth alternative is for Trump to postpone the elections due to a worsening of the pandemic, a cyberattack on the voting machines or another real or invented disaster. Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law and main adviser, was asked if the election could be postponed, and he responded, “I’m not sure I can commit one way or the other (Karni and Haberman, 2020).” After the scandal that comment generated, he said he was not involved in the matter. At the end of July, Trump tweeted: “With Universal Mail-in Voting... 2020 will be the most inaccurate and fraudulent election in history... Delay the election until people can properly, securely and safely vote?” (AFP, July 30, 2020). An 1845 federal law sets the date of the presidential election. The president cannot postpone it; only Congress can amend the law. Even if Congress were to do so, which is impossible because the House has a Democratic majority, the Constitution mandates that the president and the vice president must leave their posts on January 20 (Burns, 2020).

A fifth scenario is for Trump to lose the election by a narrow margin and then claim there was fraud. It should be recalled that in the 2016 campaign, he stated he would not accept a Hillary Clinton victory. In the 2000 election, Democratic candidate Al Gore won the popular vote (as did Hillary Clinton in 2016), but the key decision by the Electoral College was subordinated to the results of the very close voting in Florida. There was a long vote recount and the Supreme Court (then more ideologically balanced than today) decided in favor of George W. Bush. Today, the Court has a conservative majority, and if there were a similar issue, it would vote for Trump (in 2020, however, Chief Justice John Roberts changed his vote three times, joining with the four progressive judges on major cases.) In an interview with Fox News on July 19, Trump suggested that he might not accept the election results if he lost. (Rogers, 2020).

In a worst case scenario, if, despite the previous analysis, the president were reelected, Nobel Prize laureate Paul Krugman (2020a) predicts that in his second term, Trump would become an autocrat.²⁸ He would punish anyone opposing him, he would introduce further obstacles to freedom of the press, he would purge all civil servants not supporting him and replace them with loyal appointees, he would increase the division in the country for his own benefit,²⁹ he would try to impose his will on the states, and would break up peaceful demonstrations. He would do all of this with the support of obedient Republicans, ultra-rightist religious sects, racists and misogynists, white power groups and neo-Nazis. And of course, there would be a flare-up of the Funnel Law.

For how long would it be necessary to suffer through this? Trump himself has said a couple of times, supposedly jokingly, that under normal rules, he would have to leave office in 2024, so he might seek a third term that is prohibited by the Constitution, which sets a maximum of two terms for the president (Politico, 2019). John Bolton (2020), former national security adviser, revealed in his book that Trump told Xi, the Chinese leader, that Americans wanted to eliminate the constitutional limitation of two terms of office for the president. More recently, Trump stated, “Never again will another President inherit empty shelves or expired products. At least — hopefully, in five years you’re talking about. It may be 9 years; it may be 13 years (“*Trump insinúa* [Trump Insinuates]...”, 2020).” The cases of various Latin American presidents who were democratically elected for one term, but later either changed the law or the constitution to get reelected various times, becoming autocrats, provide an ominous antecedent for this.

¹ The author is solely responsible for content of this article, but is grateful for the useful comments received from Aníbal Pérez-Liñán (Professor of Political Science, University of Notre Dame), Silvia Borzutzky (Adjunct Professor of Political Science, Carnegie Mellon University), Verónica Montecinos (Professor of Sociology, Penn State University), Elaine Acosta (Visiting Research Scholar, Florida International University) and Emilio Morales (President & CEO at Havana Consulting Group). I am also grateful to Daniel Sherr for

translating an earlier version of this article, which I have since revised and expanded and to Iraidia Iturralde president of the Cuban Cultural Center of New York who generously lent her time and support to locate pertinent addressees of the article, which has now been updated through August 11, 2020.

² In May, after two White House aides tested positive, Trump ordered all West Wing employees to use masks, except for himself (Shear, 2020). In a visit to the Mayo Clinic to visit covid patients, Vice President Pence was not wearing a mask, although the institution required it and everyone around him was wearing one. Several Secret Service agents assigned to Pence's security contracted the virus. It was not until the beginning of July, with new flare-ups of the virus, that he wears one for the first time.

³ The Washington Post has a team (The Fact Checker) that does a daily truth check on Trump's statements and keeps a running total of the falsehoods. See the book *Donald Trump and His Assault on Truth* (Simon & Schuster).

⁴ For a profound study of inequalities in the United States see Reich, 2013.

⁵ http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ley_del_Embudo (*Law of the Funnel*); May 18, 2020.

⁶ On how these motivations determine Trump's foreign policy, see C. Mesa-Lago 2019.

⁷ Graham immediately announced he would launch an investigation on the matter only to backtrack a few hours later (Wagner, 2020).

⁸ The president has repeatedly lied regarding his performance: 1) "We are testing more people per capita than South Korea, the United Kingdom, France, Japan, Sweden, Finland, and many other countries, in some cases combined." (He omitted 24 countries with higher per capita testing rates, such as Germany, Canada, Spain, and Switzerland.); and 2) the number of cases in the United States is falling "rapidly throughout the country." (There are states where this has occurred, such as New York, but the opposite is true in nine states and 24 other states have showed no change (figures from John Hopkins University.)

⁹ Jared Kushner, who has no medical expertise, asserted that New York did not need 30,000 ventilators because "I have all this data about I.C.U. capacity... I'm doing my own projections, and I've gotten a lot smarter about this. New York doesn't need all the ventilators."

¹⁰ See C. Mesa-Lago, 2017.

¹¹ If Trump had intended to impose a reopening and the states had refused, the conflict would have gone to the federal courts and perhaps, even to the Supreme Court, delaying the decision for months and hurting his reelection chances.

¹² Governors have complained that the scarcity of tests is the major obstacle to reopening the economy. The governor of Virginia said that he was "fighting a biological war without supplies." McConnell, Republican leader of the Senate, declared that states requesting federal aid should declare bankruptcy rather than receive federal help.

¹³ Pence asserted that the termination of the Task Force was due to the "tremendous progress we've made" against covid-19, when in reality, the opposite has occurred: the tremendous progress of the pandemic.

¹⁴ Trump prohibited Fauci from testifying in the House of Representatives because it has a Democratic majority.

¹⁵ According to a CNN poll in May, 84% of Republicans trust covid-19 information provided by Trump while only 4% of Democrats find such information reliable. On the other hand, 61% of Republicans and 81% of Democrats believe the information presented by Dr. Fauci. In a June New York Times poll, 84% of voters -- 90% of Democrats and 75% of Republicans -- trusted information provided by scientists.

¹⁶ The change of venue generated enormous problems and uncertainty: 58% of voters in the county where Jacksonville is located were opposed to the Convention being held there, the city's mayor required masks at meetings in the Convention, and many delegates said they would not attend. Republicans who donated millions of dollars for Charlotte lost their money, which had already been spent in Charlotte (the city asked for a federal reimbursement), and were reluctant to give more.

¹⁷ Herman Cain, an Afro-American supporter of Trump's and a former presidential candidate, attended the Tulsa rally in Arizona. He subsequently tested positive for the virus, had to be hospitalized, and died.

¹⁸ Pence also repeatedly distorted the truth: a) "As we stand here today, all 50 states and territories across this country are opening up safely and responsibly... We've flattened the curve... 34 states across the country ... are experiencing a measure of stability" (In reality, cases were going up in 58% of the states, 41,113 in a single day, and various governors had frozen the reopening.); b) he further denied there would be a second wave of the virus, asserting that the increase in covid-19 in various states was the result of the increase in testing, not of the expansion of the pandemic; and c) he falsely affirmed, "We're in a much better place than we were four months ago or even two months ago" (Qiu, 2020; Wolf, 2020b). As has already been pointed out, various states were putting the reopening process on hold or returning to restrictions (Mazzei et al., 2020).

¹⁹ Charlie Kirk, Republican assistant to Donald Trump, Jr., falsely asserted that the medication was "100% effective in treating the virus." Fox News "star" Laura Ingraham affirmed the same for months and strongly promoted the medication. A study of 388 patients in Veterans Affairs hospitals proved that the drug was associated with deaths because of cardiac complications. *The Lancet* concluded that the drug is ineffective after having investigated its effects on 96,200 coronavirus patients. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned of mortal risks associated with the use of hydroxychloroquine, and a Fox News announcer urged people "not to take it, it will kill you." Despite this irrefutable evidence, Trump continued to press the country to take the medication.

²⁰ Bolsonaro, the president of Brazil, said: "The flu (covid-19) can be serious for people in the risk group, but here we have hydroxychloroquine. Here in Brazil, it's being applied in various hospitals... Thank God, God is Brazilian, the cure is right here." Bolsonaro ordered the military to produce this fake treatment in their laboratory and gave them millions of dollars in grants to do it. The Brazilian Minister for Human Rights, an Evangelical pastor, declared that the drug was a "miracle." Critics were accused of being leftist (Londoño and Simões, 2020).

²¹ Taxpayers have paid at least a million dollars since the president took office for 1,600 nightly room rentals at hotels and clubs belonging to the Trump company, run by his children. (Fahrenthold y Partlow, 2020). A lawsuit accuses Trump of violating the Constitution by receiving emoluments in addition to his salary. It accuses him of corruption by profiting from his Washington, D.C. hotel (Larson, 2020).

²² After receiving a request from Trump to help him win reelection (as revealed by John Bolton, 2020), Xi Jinping promised to purchase over \$36 billion worth of agricultural products, but in 2020 these purchases were well below 2017 levels. As a result, U.S. farmers had lost \$14.4 billion. Trump compensated them, giving farmers \$23.5 billion in the first stimulus package (Swanson and Rappeport, 2020).

²³ When he was governor of Florida, Scott toughened the eligibility requirements for unemployment benefits, which allowed him to cut business taxes.

²⁴ The Congressional Budget Office projects a \$16 trillion loss to the economy over a decade (Cochrane, 2020).

²⁵ The Republicans are taking advantage of the pandemic to demand the building of the wall and the reinforcement of other immigration measures. In April, Trump issued a decree suspending immigration, and

in June, he prohibited the entry of 500,000 workers with visas, even those who have already applied for green cards.

²⁶ As a percentage of the labor force, unemployment decreased from a peak of 14.8% in April to 13.4% in May, 11.1% in June and 10.2% in July. Still, in July, 16.4 million Americans were jobless and 30 million were receiving unemployment benefits, and the July unemployment rate was higher than at its peak during the Great Recession, meaning the highest since the Great Depression. The decrease was due to several factors: the reopening of the economy, many unemployed were not actively seeking employment because they knew how difficult it was to get jobs (hence they were not counted as unemployed) and some of the employed worked part time (those that were temporarily unemployed were counted as employed). Race inequality was rampant: unemployment among Afro-Americans was 16.8% and 17.6% among Hispanics, above the 12.4% rate for whites (Tankersley et al., 2020; Tankersley and Cochrane, 2020; Krugman, 2020b; Schwartz and Friedman, 2020).

²⁷ This absurdity provoked a generalized negative reaction from scientists who, along with disinfectant manufacturers and the authorities, warned the public of the fatal consequences of taking or injecting the products. Even so, many did. Trump alleged he had not been serious, but was speaking sarcastically; not even Fox News accepted that explanation.

²⁸ After Trump averted impeachment, Republic Senator Susan Collins argued he had learned “a great lesson,” to which House Judiciary Committee special counsel Barry Berke retorted that the president would emerge emboldened from that victory and would do as he pleased, a correct prediction, as amply demonstrated by this article.

²⁹ After former President George W. Bush called for national unity in the face of the pandemic, pointing out “how small our differences are in the face of this shared threat...,” and adding, “We are not partisan combatants. We are human beings... We rise or fall together...,” Trump posted a tweet criticizing him because he had not called for unity during his impeachment, “the greatest hoax in American history!” (Lovelace, 2020).

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19, the Economic Crisis and Trump’s Inequities

The article studies inequities in Donald Trump's policies first with the 2017 tax reform and then concerning the covid-19: 1) his belated and infamous policy (or lack thereof) in the face of the pandemic; 2) the unconstitutionality of Trump’s declaration of having full power over the states; 3) the numerous cases in which Trump, his allies and large corporations have benefited from covid-19; 4) the economic rescue packages, the initial focus on helping large corporations and the struggle of Democrats to improve equity; 5) the triage that theoretically must be objective and ethical but in practice privileges the rich and powerful while sacrificing the poor, elderly, Hispanics and African-Americans; and 6) the people's reaction to Trumpian policies over covid-19 and their potential impact on the elections.

Carmelo Mesa-Lago is Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Economics and Latin American Studies at the University of Pittsburgh and has been a visiting professor/ researcher in 8 countries and lecturer in 39; author of 94 books/monographs and 318 articles/chapters published in 9 languages in 34 countries, on social security, comparative economic systems and Cuba’s economy and social policy. His most recent books: *Market, Socialist and Mixed Economies: Comparative Policy and Performance* (Johns Hopkins U. Press, 2002); *Reassembling Social Security* (Oxford U. Press, 2008, 2012); *Pensions in the Philippines: Challenges and Ways Forward* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2011); and *Voices of Change in Cuba* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018). His articles on Trump have been published in *Transition* (Harvard University), *El País*, *Estudios de Política Exterior* and Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales (Madrid), *Nueva Sociedad* and *Pensamiento Crítico* (Buenos Aires) and *Letras Libres* (Mexico). He has worked as an international consultant throughout Latin America and the Caribbean with most international financial organizations, several U.N. branches, and national/foreign foundations. Was President of the Latin American Studies Association, is a member of the U. S. National Academy of Social Insurance and has received: ILO International Prize on Decent Work (shared with Nelson Mandela), Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung Senior Prize, 2 Senior Fulbrights, Homage for his research from University of Pittsburgh and Florida International University and for his life work on social protection from two regional social security organizations; was finalist for Spain’s Prince of Asturias Prize on Social Sciences in 2014; selected among 50 most influential Ibero-American intellectuals 2014. Website: www.mesa-lago.com