

Prognosis: Negative

December 15, 2020

Ah, the Law of
Unintended Consequences!

It doesn't apply just to
government programs.
It also applies to
journalistic crusades.

What am I talking about?

Well, by now, it is pretty
clear that the mask mandates, social distancing
efforts, and lockdown policies have not worked
very well, if at all. But that hasn't stopped
corporate newsmedia.

From what?

From inducing panic by playing up the negative
aspects of the COVID epidemic, and downplaying
— even suppressing — information that would
mitigate . . . their propagation of panic.

And policies of an extreme nature.

**By overstating their
case, and even flagrantly
fibbing, they may be
inoculating us from the
very disease they promote.**

Jacob Sullum, writing at *Reason*, calls our
attention to recent research: “Based on an
analysis of news stories about COVID-19 that
appeared from January 1 through July 31,
Dartmouth economist Bruce Sacerdote and



two other researchers found that 91 percent of
the coverage by major U.S. media outlets was
'negative in tone.' The rate was substantially
lower in leading scientific journals (65 percent)
and foreign news sources (54 percent).”

It has consequences: “This unrelenting,
indiscriminate negativity fosters suspicion and
resistance. Journalists and politicians who
repeatedly cry wolf should not be surprised at
the lack of cooperation when the beast
actually appears.”

Which suggests that corporate media's approach
to the disease and our responses to it has had
effects quite the opposite of what leftist Yellow
Journalists aim: total government control of the
populace in the cause of fighting a disease.

By overstating their case, and even flagrantly
fibbing, they may be inoculating us from the very
disease they promote.

That disease being not COVID, of course, but
Therapeutic Totalitarianism.

This is Common Sense. I'm Paul Jacob.