

I was so impressed with this report I wanted to share it with my readers.

Source: New York Times; The Morning Report by David Leonhardt – paraphrased

“The original American advocate for inoculation against severe disease was arguably an enslaved man named Onesimus. Before being forcibly brought to Boston, Onesimus seems to have lived in West Africa, where inoculation was a common practice. There, he had been deliberately infected with a small amount of smallpox to make him immune from a more severe version.

In Boston, Onesimus told his owner, Cotton Mather, about the practice. Mather was among the colonies’ most prominent religious leaders in the 1720s. He was also keenly interested in science, as Burns told me when we spoke recently ... past religious leaders were scientific pioneers.

When smallpox began spreading in Boston in the 1720s, Mather campaigned for residents to be inoculated — and was met with fierce criticism and even an attempt to bomb his home. Some Bostonians argued that inoculation violated God’s will. Others, including doctors, argued that it was folklore that would do more harm than good. These arguments were powerful because inoculation was so counterintuitive. Mather was claiming that people could avoid getting sick ... by getting sick.

Modern vaccination is somewhat less counterintuitive because drugs can now teach the immune system to respond to a deadly virus, without having to use small amounts of an actual virus. But vaccination is still a strange notion. It involves the injection of a mysterious cocktail of foreign substances into the human body.

In Mather’s time, one such evangelist for inoculation was Benjamin Franklin. Along with several other founders — including George Washington, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson — Franklin himself was persuaded. Yet he still had a tragic relationship with smallpox inoculation.

As the disease was sweeping through Philadelphia in 1736, he and his wife, Deborah, initially decided not to inoculate their 4-year-old son Francis, known as Franky. The boy was sick with a cold and the Franklins worried that his body would not be able to handle the side effects of inoculation. Soon, though, Franky contracted smallpox and died. ‘This is the great tragedy of Franklin’s life,’ Burns told me. ‘Deborah and Benjamin Franklin were just beset by this mistake they made even though it was completely understandable.’

In the years that followed, Franklin tried to persuade others to avoid his family’s fate.

‘Surely parents will no longer refuse to accept and thankfully use a discovery God in his mercy has been pleased to bless mankind with,’ Franklin wrote, in a pro-inoculation pamphlet. ‘For the loss of one in 10 thereby is not merely the loss of so many persons, but the accumulated loss of all the children and children’s children the deceased might have had, multiplied by successive generations.’

In the U.S. today, the death toll from COVID has exceeded 950,000, and many of those deaths occurred after vaccines were available.

It is a tragic pattern that’s consistent with history: Vaccination tends to be both counterintuitive and highly effective.” (end article)

And it is just as controversial as it was 200 years ago.

Thank you for listening, and God bless us one and all.