


Substantial Disruption



The Year of the Stork

By Mike Tully

According to the Chinese calendar, 2021 will be the Year of The Ox. Don't you believe it. Next year will be the Year of The Stork.

In August of 1966, when I was in high school, my parents and I spent a few vacation days in southern Nevada, visiting relatives who lived in Las Vegas. We stayed in Henderson, which was a few miles away. I still remember the headline on the front page of the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*: "Guess What's Happening Nine Months After the Great Blackout?"

The headline and accompanying article referred to The Great Northeast Blackout, a massive power failure on November 9, 1965 that plunged much of the northeast into darkness. According to [History.com](https://www.history.com), "At dusk, the biggest power failure in U.S. history occurs as all of New York state, portions of seven neighboring states, and parts of eastern Canada are plunged into darkness. The Great Northeast Blackout began at the height of rush hour, delaying millions of commuters, trapping 800,000 people in New York's subways, and stranding thousands more in office buildings, elevators, and trains."

Nine months later, some New York City hospitals reported a bump in the local birthrate that several commentators attributed to the giant blackout. Hence, the Las Vegas headline. *The New York Times* also ran three articles about the apparent phenomenon, starting with a piece on [August 10, 1966](https://www.nytimes.com/1966/08/10/archives/births-up-9-months-after-the-blackout.html), with the headline: "Births Up 9 Months After the Blackout." It seemed like a great story, perhaps a lesson in how humans cope with unexpected confinement, but turned out to be an urban myth. "Despite initial reports of New York City hospitals' seeing a dramatic increase in the number of births nine months after the 1965 blackout, later analyses showed the birth rate during that period to be well within the norm," [reported Snopes.com](https://www.snopes.com). Health Commissioner Dr. Lowell E. Bellin offered an interesting explanation: "My conclusion is that it was so dark they couldn't find the bedroom." That's not a problem in 2020, as people shelter in place riding out the COVID 19 pandemic. The lights are on.

Question: What is the most successful seduction line in human history?

Answer: "I don't know, what do you want to do?"

While the Blackout Baby Boom turned out to be a bust, the COVID Confinement is likely to spark a lot of well, sparking. As Glenn T. Stanton wrote recently in [thefederalist.com](https://www.thefederalist.com), "It has long been a cultural phenomenon that generally when people are confined to their homes due to dramatic weather events or power outages, a rash of babies start springing forth nine months later. The longer the seclusion, the greater likelihood." Stanton cited some examples. On August 2, 2010, the [Washington Post reported](https://www.washingtonpost.com) "Nine months after winter storms, some area hospitals expect a spike in births," referring to historic snowstorms in December of 2009 and February of

2010. On May 26, 2013, [The New York Times reported](#) on the “Sandy Syndrome,” which resulted in a bump of “hurricane babies” nine months after Hurricane Sandy hit the region. A University of Pennsylvania study [found a significant increase](#) in the birth rate of New York boroughs following the 9-11 attack.

Stanton cited other examples, including [a study published](#) in the *Journal of Popular Economics* that associated an increase in fertility with hurricanes. The study suggests an inverse relationship between the intensity of hurricanes and sexual activity, however: “We find that a positive and significant fertility effect is associated with the lowest level of storm advisory: tropical storm watches. However, we find that the estimated fertility effect decreases monotonically from positive to negative as the storm advisory severity increases. A significant negative fertility effect is associated with the most severe advisory level: hurricane warnings.” It's sexy when you shake the bed; not so much when the bed shakes you.

We don't know what impact the COVID Confinement will have on birth rates, but it's not difficult to foresee a surge in maternity room activity some 8 to 12 months from now. Some may note that, while the confinement and boredom could inspire procreative activity, economic uncertainty might restrain it. But since when do financial considerations override a roll in the hay? A study of birth rates in the United States from 2005 to 2018, [published late last year](#) in *statistica.com*, found “In 2018, women in households with an income below the poverty threshold had the highest birth rate at 77 births per 1,000 women.” As Stanton dryly observed, “The human sex drive is exponentially more powerful than economic discipline. And human sexuality is opportunistic. It happens when we have time, when we are lonely and need solace.”

Sex is incompatible with social distancing. *Mission Local*, a publication in the San Francisco Bay area, [recently reported on](#) “Joe and Katharine,” whose five month relationship was impeded by the COVID Confinement. “So, for now,” wrote Julian Mark, “their trysts remain at a six-foot distance.” But the Confinement drove other couples in a different direction. “‘If we were going to do it, we had to do it fast,’ said Anna, a 27-year-old software engineer, whose boyfriend had plans to move in with her sometime this spring. When news broke of the distancing measure, those plans accelerated,” reported the *Mission Local*.

If I was the wagering type, I would bet on a COVID Confinement baby boom. Hospital maternity wards should start planning now. So should manufacturers of baby clothes, formulae, and cribs. Financial planners and insurance agents could prepare their pitches for new parents. And hardware stores should anticipate a run on paint, as spare bedrooms are turned into nurseries. Stock up on the pink and blue, Sherwin Williams.