


Substantial Disruption



Storming the Beaches of Ignominy

By Mike Tully

*Well there ain't no time to wonder why
Whoopee! we're all gonna die*

- from "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag," by *Country Joe and the Fish* (Joe Allen McDonald, 1968)

Hey there, you in the MAGA hat, are you willing to die for your Dear Leader's re-election? He wants you to. After all, you're a soldier now, and when your leader sends you into battle to face possible injury or death, you must go. Storm the beaches in Florida, Texas and California! Invade the bars and restaurants! Plant your flag in hair salons and gyms! The "Wartime President" summons you to action.

"In recent days, he's begun describing citizens as 'warriors' in the battle against the pandemic," [says the Los Angeles Times](#) about the President, "and suggested some of those fighters might have to die if that will help boost the economy." "Will some people be affected badly?" he asked rhetorically during a recent visit to Arizona. "Yes. But we have to get our country open, and we have to get it open soon."

It's not just the economy. As Nate Silver of *FiveThirtyEight* [notes](#), "the strong likelihood of a potentially very deep recession triggered by coronavirus puts Trump's reelection chances in jeopardy." Donald Trump based his reelection on a strong economy because he doesn't have anything else to run on. The rest of his so-called policies are either dim-witted or divisive, but everybody loves a booming economy. He has to restart the economy to have a remote chance at reelection – and many will die for his political benefit. He thinks his followers will fall for it. Maybe [Darwin Award](#) finalists will.

Some of the MAGA-heads already think of themselves as soldiers. We've seen their cosplay in Michigan, where they stormed the capitol, demanding rescission of the Governor's stay-at-home order, screaming at what they say is "tyranny." They wore angry red MAGA hats and phony camouflage while some brandished Confederate battle flags and "Don't Tread on Me" banners. Most were well-fed white guys who clutched and stroked their weapons like a favorite body part.

But they weren't wearing masks. Soldiers for Trump don't wear masks. Face masks are for sissies and liberals – to them, the same thing. "On the right, where the mask is often seen as the symbol of a purported overreaction to the coronavirus," [write Ryan Lizza and Daniel Lippman](#) in *Politico*, "mask promotion is a target of ridicule." They note that face masks have been "turned into a token of tribal affiliation."

COVID-19 does not recognize tribal affiliation. It dines on lungs and conservative lungs are just as tasty as liberal lungs. An easy way to block lung-to-lung transmission is to wear a mask to arrest infected droplets before they are coughed or exhaled into somebody else's air. Many unmasked people don't have symptoms and don't think they have the coronavirus, so why use a mask? Here is why: if you are asymptomatic and shedding the virus, *you are the virus*.

Trump is all about keeping score and settling scores, so he constantly talks about numbers. He wants good numbers. High unemployment: bad number. Massive business failures: bad number. Substantial COVID-19 casualties: bad number. Trump is prematurely reopening the country to get rid of the first two. That will increase the third bad number, so he moves the goalposts to make it look not as bad. In February [he said the COVID-19 death count](#) “within a couple of days is going to be down to close to zero, that’s a pretty good job we’ve done.” On March 29th he said a death toll in the range of 100,000 to 200,000 people would mean he had “done a very good job.” That’s because they will die for a worthy cause: his reelection. Meanwhile, he’s reluctant to pursue widespread testing because that could make his numbers look bad.

It’s not unprecedented to sacrifice human lives for economic reasons. Why are there so few protected railroad crossings? Because they’re expensive. Why are railroad tracks not fenced in within most municipal boundaries? Because it’s expensive. One of my law clients was a railroad engineer who was bringing a train into central Tucson when a small girl, probably 4 or 5 years old, wandered out of her yard and onto the tracks, where she sat, blissfully unaware of the metal giant bearing down on her. My client desperately hit the brakes. But trains don’t stop on a dime; the little girl was killed. He wondered aloud if he could have saved her had he climbed out of the cab and worked his way to the front of the train to knock her out of the way. I said he would have been killed had he tried. He said he’d have been okay with that. Was the money saved leaving the tracks unfenced worth the cost? The railroad thought so; he didn’t.

There’s an old saying: “A Single Death is a Tragedy; a Million Deaths is a Statistic.” The little girl’s death was a tragedy to her family and my client. To the railroad, it was a line in the budget. Many industries weigh liability against profits, including railroads, coal mines, and trucking companies. For Trump, the score-keeper, two hundred thousand deaths for the sake of re-animating the economy and ensuring his reelection is an acceptable statistic, “a very good job.”

Thousands of Americans will die unnecessarily because coronavirus precautions are being relaxed prematurely at Trump’s urging. He believes voters will reward him for rescuing the economy, even at such a cost. But his recipe lacks an important ingredient: humanity. That will be his undoing. He sows the wind and will reap the whirlwind – the virus-laden whirlwind.