

Coronavirus
When Should Freedom Stay Home?

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I first heard about “Coronavirus” from Reddit, as I’m sure many others did as well.¹ In hindsight, I’m both surprised by the lack of initial response on the part of world governments, but also surprised by the rapid reporting of the situation, no doubt due to interest from those in the medical field. It started as many movie plots start, with a few “isolated” cases making the news, and the usual comment sections full of fear mongering and FUD (fear, uncertainty, and doubt). One never quite anticipates when they will be taking part in history, nor can one precisely predict on which side of that particular microcosm of history one will be left standing. I find that this occurrence hails the arrival of a dilemma for our very dear American Freedom, thus producing problems for our American Dream, and I shall elucidate how this is.

Firstly, one must consider the impact of SARS, a highly contagious virus of similar geographic origin (relatively speaking), whose chief malady seemed to be depression of respiratory capacity, presumably thereby leading to a high mortality rate.² I will not delve into the studies which have taken place regarding the potential controversy surrounding this rather simplistic and artless characterization of such a great danger to the general public.³ SARS itself was carefully contained before it could cause widespread damage, however, “COVID-19” -- this being the more-esoteric nomenclature used for what is generally referred to as “Coronavirus ” -- finds itself spreading with as much guile as a calculated attack.⁴ I myself have encountered

¹ “Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19),” Reddit, Accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.reddit.com/r/Coronavirus/>.

² “Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS),” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Reviewed December 6, 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/sars/index.html>.

³ Ashley Yeager, “Lost Smell and Taste Hint COVID-19 Can Target the Nervous System,” *TheScientist*, March 24, 2020, <https://www.the-scientist.com/news-opinion/lost-smell-and-taste-hint-covid-19-can-target-the-nervous-system-67312>.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).”

numerous “meme” presentations of this pestilence as nothing more than a rogue deity playing its own rendition of the popular video game “Plague Inc.”⁵ This depiction falls short of the apotheosis of COVID-19’s effects that will continue to shape the current calamity we find ourselves in.

My initial reaction when learning of a newly discovered virus was a blend of indifference, both at this disease which was then-worlds-away and, ashamedly, as a result of the expectation that nothing so exciting as a “pandemic” could find itself at home in the 21st century of advanced warnings and fully-optimized corporate profits. How wrong I was, when I concurred with my professor for Advanced Databases when he concluded that he was to win a wager set with my own advisor as to whether we all would be returning from Spring Break. I would have taken the same wager at the time, given the opportunity, and would have argued that we would never have any need for the small block of print placed at the bottom of every class syllabus, titled “In Case of Pandemic.” You see, at that time, news of the event had circulated, but no formal government action had yet to take place. In fact, the initial week of spring break (for it was to be a week only, but was then later expanded into two) featured many of my classmates sojourning to warmer venues, chief among them being Florida itself, which would later prove itself a hotbed of viral activity.⁶

However, by the second week, any public discussion of venturing toward spaces as public as beaches became intractable, as the sill of the day’s Overton Window closed in on the

⁵ Philipp Kachalin, “China Bans Plague Inc. Amid The Coronavirus Outbreak,” *Know Your Meme News*, February 28, 2020, <https://news.knowyourmeme.com/news/china-bans-plague-inc-amid-the-coronavirus-outbreak>.

⁶ Orlando Sentinel Staff, “Florida coronavirus update for Wednesday: Deaths top 1,500 with more than 38,000 cases,” *Orlando Sentinel*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/coronavirus/os-ne-coronavirus-wednesday-may-6-20200506-7m6b4disbvczzb5aiky6hgrqye-story.html>.

mere suggestion of possibly endangering those most near-and-dear to our hearts, Grandma and Grandpa. In this, I held a personal stake, as my own quartet remained intact, but barely so and only then on the extension of the graces of western medicine. I am proud, but not too proud, to state that I did not take any liberties in shirking my responsibility to my fellow citizen by spreading revelry (and principally, contagion) through beachfront enterprises during that time, but I would be delinquent if I did not expose my true motivation, which resided simply in my own lethargy and physical exhaustion resulting from my pre-break studies. Although this is unknowable, I might have also found myself among the throngs during that week, had I been more oracularly informed of what was to supplant the festive late-semester endeavors that had so easily captured our collective preparation, as we treasured the culmination and cessation of our post-secondary education.

Let us adhere then, to what is knowable. As “essential” became the buzzword of the day, the death toll accelerated to a statistic.⁷ At the present time, the reported death toll is approximately 73,000. This does not consider those dying “with” the disease, where a heart attack could arguably be attributed to viral causes, nor does it count the untested corpses which have contributed to the necessity of refrigerated trailers being situated near major hospitals to ease the load on local morgues.⁸ The total infected count is in excess of 1.2 million, but this does

⁷ Louis Casiano, “Coronavirus: Who are considered ‘essential’ workers?” *Fox News*, March 23, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/coronavirus-who-are-considered-essential-workers>; Ethan Siegel, “Why ‘Exponential Growth’ Is So Scary For The COVID-19 Coronavirus,” *Forbes*, March 17, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/startswithabang/2020/03/17/why-exponential-growth-is-so-scary-for-the-covid-19-coronavirus/#8bed2004e9b2>.

⁸Sergio Hernandez, Sean O-Key, Amanda Watts, Byron Manley, and Henrik Pettersson, “Tracking Covid-19 cases in the US,” *Cable News Network*, Updated May 6, 2020, Accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/health/coronavirus-us-maps-and-cases/>; Simon Shuster, “I Still Can’t Believe What I’m Seeing,’ What It’s Like to Live Across the

not consider any untested individuals, regardless of symptomatic character.⁹ In response to these horrific statistics, contingencies have been enacted and plans for the worst implemented. Yet not all are together on the same side.

I shall attempt to expound upon this latter point. Numerous states have begun to issue stay-at-home orders, dictating that Americans stay home except for essential travel, as employers request that employees conduct work remotely, spawning mass work-from-home.¹⁰ Of particular interest are the events currently unfolding in the state of Michigan, a state of political contention and strong polarization.¹¹ Effective March 24, Governor Gretchen Whitmer put in place a stay-at-home order, following up on a prior executive order declaring a state of emergency, given on March 10.¹² Although almost anyone can stay home for a few days, some individuals have found themselves unable to cope with confinement for an entire month, taking to the streets in protest on April 15.¹³ On April 30, armed protestors congregated near and inside the state capitol building as part of an event christened “Operation Gridlock,” creating widespread

Street From a Temporary Morgue During the Coronavirus Outbreak,” *TIME*, March 31, 2020, <https://time.com/5812569/covid-19-new-york-morgues/>.

⁹ Sergio Hernandez, Sean O-Key, Amanda Watts, Byron Manley, and Henrik Pettersson, “Tracking Covid-19 cases in the US.”

¹⁰ Vicky Valet, “Working From Home During The Coronavirus Pandemic: What You Need To Know,” *Forbes*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/vickyvalet/2020/03/12/working-from-home-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-what-you-need-to-know/#5cb423e41421>.

¹¹ Ed Rendell, “Trump’s ‘big three’ battleground states will turn blue again in 2020,” *THE HILL*, June 4, 2019, <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/446771-trumps-big-three-battleground-states-will-turn-blue-again-in-2020>.

¹² Gretchen Whitmer, “Executive Order 2020-21 (COVID-19),” Accessed May 6, 2020, https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/0,9309,7-387-90499_90705-522626--,00.html.

¹³ Mark Moore, “Protesters clog streets in Michigan over Whitmer coronavirus stay-home order,” *New York Post*, April 15, 2020, <https://nypost.com/2020/04/15/michigan-citizens-protest-over-coronavirus-stay-home-order/>.

controversy.¹⁴ Echoing the infamous chant of only four years prior, protestors at the April 15 demonstration chanted “lock her up,” in reference to Governor Whitmer.¹⁵

Some justifications for the protest hinged on distrust of prescribed medical advice, or the position that individuals assert an autonomy on society that should not be constrained by mandated practice and should instead rely on personal best judgment.¹⁶ Indeed, I myself find myself sympathetic towards those concerned by statements made by government health officials wherein they described an altered future in which “normalcy” is never restored.¹⁷ In fact, on April 11, Governor Whitmer even went as far as to extend the stay-at-home order to include trips to friends and relatives.¹⁸ And yet I find myself agreeing with Governor Whitmer’s

¹⁴ Louis Casiano, “Michigan protesters storm state Capital in fight over coronavirus rules: ‘Men with rifles yelling at us’,” *Fox News*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/michigan-lansing-coronavirus-protest-capitol-guns-rifles>; Allan Smith, “‘Lock her up!’: Anti-Whitmer coronavirus lockdown protestors swarm Michigan Capitol,” *NBC News*, April 15, 2020, Updated April 16, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/lock-her-anti-whitmer-coronavirus-lockdown-protestors-swarm-michigan-capitol-n1184426>.

¹⁵ Allan Smith, “‘Lock her up!’: Anti-Whitmer coronavirus lockdown protestors swarm Michigan Capitol.”; Chris Cillizza, “How ‘Lock Her Up!’ just blew up,” *Cable News Network*, Updated January 10, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/10/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-justice-department/index.html>.

¹⁶ Allan Smith, “‘Lock her up!’: Anti-Whitmer coronavirus lockdown protestors swarm Michigan Capitol.”

¹⁷ Noah Higgins-Dunn, “White House health advisor Fauci says we may never get back to ‘normal’ after coronavirus pandemic,” *CNBC*, April 6, 2020, Updated April 7, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/06/coronavirus-fight-white-house-health-advisor-fauci-says-we-never-get-back-to-normal.html>.

¹⁸ Brie Stimson, “Michigan stay-at-home order now bans visits to friends, relatives, governor says,” *Fox News*, April 11, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/michigan-stay-at-home-order-now-bans-visits-to-friends-relatives-governor-says>.

denouncement of the movement, and her determination that the protestors' actions had assuredly worsened the final outcome for all.¹⁹

An important question is posed by the movement, if not directly: Is American Freedom based on the position that individuals should not be unduly restricted via artificial statute, or is American Freedom founded in the idea that greater freedoms can be afforded through collaborative efforts dictated according to official policy? Without the added benefits of an organized society, modern medicine might not exist in the first place, yet the idea of "freedom" endears itself through promises of a greater variety of viable options becoming available to the individual. Further, one must question whose "policy" is present in the American brand of freedom. Should we defer to the wisdom of medical professionals over those whose primary interests are rooted in financial speculation?

Had I a say in the matter, I would posit that one should be just as entitled to virus-free air as they are to clean water, assuming that both can be allotted for an individual within reasonable and accessible means. However, when this is not the case, due care should be taken to minimize risks to others, and one should not attempt to assert the right to infringe on another individual's "viral bubble" simply for fading fancies. That is where one's rights end and another's begin. However, I am not the authoritative voice on the American Dream, nor do I believe anyone is, except perhaps someone who has both lived the dream and died for it. Certainly, there may soon be many meeting that description, though none able to speak to its veracity.

¹⁹ Meagan Flynn, "Chanting 'lock her up,' Michigan protesters in MAGA hats demonstrated against Whitmer's coronavirus restrictions," *The Boston Globe*, Accessed from msn.com, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/chanting-lock-her-up-michigan-protesters-in-maga-hats-demonstrated-against-whitmers-coronavirus-restrictions/ar-BB12JInL>.

A pressing question, if not a particularly pertinent one at present, is what long-term ramifications this event will present within society. As we may never return to “normal,” the American execution of freedom becomes contingent on the solutions we devise.²⁰ Many have chosen to protest the stay-at-home orders, arguing that their freedom has been encroached upon by government mandate while flaunting a disregard for public health. If it is the case that American Freedom, the quintessential reagent to the concoctive American Dream, has been compromised, then what does that suggest regarding the viability of the dream itself? If the Dream incontrovertibly comes at the cost of the collective health and wellbeing of society, then what hope does the Dream have for collectively improving the prognosis of the everyman’s exclusive trajectory?

I have personal stake in the conclusion to this dilemma. I have been affected on the social level as an individual by finding myself unable to venture from home except for “essential” activities, due to both a precedence of social wisdom and a personal avoidance to harm or harm befalling others who are close to myself. I have been affected as an American, where I find myself questioning which “true” path must be followed when combating the realities of the world. And I have been affected as an observer of history as it rises in the proverbial oven, attending witness to statistics and tragedies alike. Whether those statistics become tragedies depends on who you are and how you choose to use your voice to describe the American Dream, whether you are a protester, bystander, or corporate profiteer. Your answer to that question will determine which side of history you will be left standing on.

²⁰ Noah Higgins-Dunn, “White House health advisor Fauci says we may never get back to ‘normal’ after coronavirus pandemic.”

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