

A Note on Our Time

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by [Morgan Young](#)

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I'm a bartender in downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee. Last week, March 14th, our business was pressured amid mounting anxiety to cancel an event we'd planned a few months prior. That event should have increased sales, netted us some publicity and helped us loosen up our margins. We were counting on it, because we're a very new, very fragile small business.

Small businesses tend to operate within very tight margins, but many people fail to understand just how tight those margins are. You can generally sum it up by saying that your annual profit, if you're successful, is about a month's worth of business. For the first five years, every loss is poignant, and every gain is borderline euphoric. Obviously, this hurt, and we would have preferred not to have done it. Nevertheless, we somehow knew that we had no choice in the matter. Although no decree was handed down by any official in any capacity, there was a vague and yet unmistakable threat lurking in the background and threatening to dart out, teeth gnashing and claws bared, should we decide to flout popular opinion and steam ahead.

The formless, faceless threat that sneered at us from behind an impenetrable wall of sanctimony was the same monster that tormented Hester Prynne. Puritanical hysteria is the monster of our time. But beyond the immediate threat of violence inherent in that beast is an even more uncanny specter. That is what I would like to call attention to with this article.

There is a reason that we implicitly understood the futility of resisting when the eye turned on us for our obeisance. There is a reason our bar has gone, in the space of eight days, from being merely fragile to being in very real danger of closing our doors forever. There is a reason I have a start-date at the Amazon warehouse this weekend for \$17.60 an hour (that's a \$2.00 per-hour increase in pay, by the way, with a bump in overtime pay, as well, obviously due to the high demand placed on the logistics behemoth in the absence of an efficient shipping framework designed by a trustworthy or even remotely competent government). There is a reason the U.S.P.S is going bankrupt. There is a reason almost half of the population of the United States have meekly acquiesced to a government mandate to stay home from work for an unspecified (actually undetermined) amount of time, while the NSA is requesting authority to suspend habeas corpus in times of "national emergency", and the Federal Reserve is basically orchestrating a coup that would make Lenin swoon.

In 1968, a strain of avian influenza known as the Hong Kong flu swept across the globe, resulting in an estimated 1 million deaths worldwide, with 100,000 or more of those occurring in the United States. Prior to that outbreak, in 1957, another avian influenza strain known as the Asian Flu broke out, culminating in approximately 1 million deaths worldwide, and around 70,000 in the United States. I'm aware that practically no one reading this article will ever have heard of these events, but you are luckily provided with fact-checking tools at your immediate disposal, and you should be using them. If you do decide to check these claims for historical accuracy, and perhaps further explore the historical context within which they are nested, you might be surprised at what you find.

In addition to the Hong Kong Flu, 1968 brought with it the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., political protests orchestrated by students all over the world, the assassination

of Robert F. Kennedy, the infamous Tet Offensive, and the Prague Spring (the irony of which is not lost, here). Incidentally, all those events will pop up if you merely google the year 1968. The Hong Kong flu, however, is conspicuously absent from the list. In short, 1968 was a busy year. But no one on the face of the earth was shunned or lambasted for going about their lives amid the turmoil. The assumption of risk was still within the purview of the individual, and the expression of compassion for one who suffers was by no means axiomatically reserved to those who would deprive the sufferer of his agency "in order to ensure his safety in the future". If a person is so concerned with your physical state of utility that they would intervene in your decision-making process in order to prevent you from compromising or diminishing that state, there is something at stake for that person beyond your well-being. That person, whether justifiably or not (depending on the recourse available to you) sees you as the legal abstraction known as chattel. More precisely, that person sees you as *their* chattel.

Beneath the latent and seething violence rippling through the fibers of our misanthropic and ravenously approval-hungry culture is a deep, moaning vacuum. We knew instinctively on the 14th of March that even if we had mustered the courage to endure the lashings we were bound to receive for ignoring public opinion, the ultimate reward would not be mere contempt, but something even more profoundly disquieting: invisibility. To be contemptible is at least to be relevant. It is at least to have a moral position worthy of being repudiated. But to be erased is something altogether different. There is no lesson to learn; no possibility of renewal; no ultimate reward to be hoped for. You may no longer participate, because you have simply ceased to be.

When a society has become this ruthless, it may no longer trust itself. It becomes a schizophrenic. And just as that

poor wretch suspects his right hand of plotting against his left, and must thus perpetually test the loyalty of his hands to their owner, so this sick and beleaguered culture of ours must continually grapple with periods of turmoil when its members periodically (and more and more frequently) glimpse the fate that they have chosen for themselves. There is nothing to believe in here except the inescapable curse of belief, itself. This culture no longer aspires. Its only wish is to die, but it cannot die. So, it abrogates the onus of its miserable existence by finally offering itself up to the one power it knows it cannot ignore and cannot deny: pain.

When a nation no longer balks at the prospect of constant surveillance, but, quite to the contrary, openly pleads for martial law to protect it from itself, that nation has abandoned any pretense of sanity. Andrew Cuomo, who some speculate is being groomed to be the dictator of the burgeoning police state, is being lauded in the press for speaking more like an autocrat than a governor. "I believe that the New York City schools should be closed, period". Whoever made that statement, he certainly wasn't a public servant. And this man is the figurehead of the panic that is currently disabling every industry in the United States that operates on a purely domestic scale, disrupting the domestic dynamics of thousands of families, distracting an entire nation from the wholesale subversion and reconfiguration of their economy, and leading its wretched citizens blithely to the salt mines and the grist mills of perpetual serfdom.

If you mock God, He will punish you; if you mock the devil, you will end as his footstool. There is obviously much more to be said, but it's getting late, and I think I've said enough to start a conversation, anyway. There aren't many with whom this note will resonate, I fear, but to those instruments more finely tuned than drums, may it resound within.