

Human Rights and COVID-19

by Mika O'Malley

In the protests regarding quarantine and social distancing, there has been an extreme shift in respect for essential workers, particularly those working in grocery stores or service jobs that cannot be temporarily halted. Video after video after yet another video, the blatant disrespect and hostility that was thrown at minimum wage workers even before the pandemic has escalated to extreme and personal violence: in an act of premeditated murder, a father and a daughter were sent home after being told by a security guard that a mask was required to enter a dollar store, retrieved a gun and returned to the store to fatally shoot 43-year-old Calvin Munerlyn, a father and dedicated member of the local community (1); three McDonald's workers were injured after a customer produced a firearm after they were told the dining area was not open as social distancing measures were in place (2); multiple cases of people purposely spitting and coughing on essential workers have surfaced as the pandemic progresses. Though social distancing is an act that would arguably make most people more comfortable, even without the threat of infection, the idea that every person has an inalienable right to act with their own freedom and interest at heart has so thoroughly permeated the Western democratic fabric that the thought of acting in the interest of others, for financial or health reasons, is simply unbelievable to some, so much so that they will act out in violence to retain what they perceive is a movement to remove individual power from citizens. More often than not, these individuals follow a new, warped, right-wing "American Theology", marrying their religious views with that of their political ones: "With or without the approval of liberals and postmodernists, Americans remain a highly religious people," writes Benjamin Lynerd, a professor of Political Science at Christopher Newport University, "As their religious commitments have diversified, civil religion has sometimes taken a more localized valence. Even as the national moral consensus dwindles, social and religious groups in America espouse value systems that have some of the qualities of civil religion" (3). Lynerd continues, "Republican theology asserts that, just as freedom is essential to virtue and faith, the reverse also holds: only those societies marked by moral virtue can sustain a free republic...Thus adherents of republican theology, even as they embrace the value of limited government, seek the purity of the nation's moral culture; any exceptions they

make to the libertarian posture are aimed at protecting the public from vices that would undermine the republic” (4).

Citations:

1. Mansell, William and Torres, Emma. Man Arrested in Killing of Family Dollar Security Guard after Facial Mask Dispute. ABCNews. 9th May, 2020
<https://abcnews.go.com/US/coronavirus-live-updates-tsa-require-employees-wear-facial/story?id=70569418>
2. Romero, Dennis. *3 McDonald's Workers hurt after Customer Attack over Coronavirus Limits, Oklahoma Police Say*. 7th May, 2020