

Brave New World

*How beauteous mankind is! O
brave new world,
That has such people in't.*

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act V, Scene I, ll. 203–206

Breathe deeply here and weep not.

I.C. Yu, *The Lost Taoist Barrio Chronicles*, 3021, vol. 309, page 103

Crazy, but we are likely the only school for the poor where all of the staff was already vaccinated in the spring - and where all of our students, 12 and up, are on the way to their second Covid shot. This victory was only possible because we know and honor our families, and they know and honor us. Makes you breathless to think how many lives and souls could be spared if, across the land, school and community were one.

I sometimes forget I am breathing. Just this powerful and simple reminder to be present with the breath, to pay attention, lies at the heart of our success on 103rd Street in this year of pandemic. While the lights of most schools for children of the poor went dark across the land, our lights remained on and our doors open. And we had no transmission of Covid in our building. Meanwhile, the best laid plans of school systems for the poor, no matter how heavily funded, proved papier-mâché Potemkin villages that quickly shuttered with the first ill winds. How tragic this all feels, particularly when bespoke education for the wealthy went on apace. So remembering that everyone is living and breathing, starting with ourselves, and feeling deep compassion for everyone who draws a breath might be really good for us now. Below is a somewhat breathless response to the last year - and some thoughts on how to move forward. I am writing to you from my corner office in El Barrio, but some of you likely know my whereabouts, particularly if there was a tracking chip in my Covid vaccination...

The mockery of White anti-vaxxers is rather *comme il faut* for late night hosts, a Bat-Signal to the liberal caped crusader! But the comedians, rightly, do not touch Black vaccine hesitancy, much less the explosion of Black male violence in places like Philadelphia. Or our national suicide rate. The truth is, most so-called *Deplorables*, many Blacks, and our celebrated *essential workers* and *first responders* of all races have been, indeed, vaccine hesitant. Ebony and Ivory. Ivory folks with recent scars from structural shifts in the economy and loss of race privilege - the ones from the *fly over states*. And the Ebony sisters and brothers in the *drive past neighborhoods*, like our sweet home here in Spanish Harlem - the people long bearing up under the weight of the endemic, mutating virus of structural racism. Can you count all of the economic and critical race theories we can see dancing with the better angels of our nature on the tip of a syringe?

The causes and effects of many of our human challenges - epidemiological, economic, ecological, and racial - distill down to individual and group despair - a potent, pellucid rotgut that corrodes mostly from the inside. And so people, ostensibly so different, in times of unrelenting crisis, fall into the same human anxiety and doubt. Denial and violence. Broken people join gangs or millennialist militias - like our hornéd QAnon shaman, a modern day Caliban - to storm the Capitol or to fire on a rival housing project. Yes, *they take refuge in their guns and their*

Bibles. In guns and God they trust. Makes sense. After all the bad faith, why would you trust a government that has failed you for a few decades - or a few centuries? This pandemic is one of those searing anthropological moments that illuminates so many facets of our society, including, but not clearly not stopping at race. Including bringing to light the lie about rugged individualism. I hear tell the Marlboro man died of lung cancer. I shudder to think of those last lonely breaths.

And what does this have to do with our shining school on a hill? We have met despair head on and won. Rather than believing that the parroting of facts is power, we act with the science and faith that the breath is power. That the balanced power of breath and body in every child is the strength of student body and school community. The strength of our liberal arts education lies in the knowledge that we all draw our breath from the sky with our feet firmly planted on the ground. No one is better than us, and no one is worse - much less *deplorable*. As the virus mutates, the leading predictors of death, if you contract Covid, seem to be obesity and anxiety related mental illness - body and soul. **So we meet the slings and arrows of a flailing system with stillness, balanced movement, vegan organic meals ([a plant based diet seems to prevent Covid](#)), play, time in nature, and the liberal arts. We act as if body and soul are precious and fragile. As if they and the mind are one, and that they need protection and healing. Neurology tells us so. Nothing less than an education, body and soul, beginning with breathing free, is the answer for every child.**

We are ever and always grateful to you for your support and spreading the word!

Love,
Ivan