

First They Came For Dr. Dao



"There is no problem on the planet that can't be solved without violence. That's the lesson of the Civil Rights Movement". (Andrew Young)

"Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict". (Dorothy Thompson)

"If you want a vision of our future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face forever". (George Orwell)

Along with our rising tides of authoritarian oppression, state sponsored bigotry and incremental losses of civil rights, we are now faced with the frightening spectacle of Dr. David Dao, who boarded United Airlines flight 3411 at Chicago O'Hare, destined for Louisville, Kentucky, and left as a severely traumatized and likely re-traumatized patient. Courtesy of a cell phone video filmed by a fellow passenger, who recorded this viscerally disgusting, unconscionable violence, we view a 69 year old pulmonologist, Vietnamese-American father and grandfather, dragged, on his back, through the center aisle of an aircraft. Three aviation security goons, now on paid leave, had slammed his face into an arm rest and then knocked him unconscious. Passengers seated nearby report that these uniformed brutes enjoyed "a good laugh" during their vicious assault. In this day of universal surveillance by the so-called powers that be, I am so grateful for the fact that ordinary citizens with cell-phone cameras are still able, for now at least, to have the technology to also watch our watchers. As a result, this amateur, somewhat wobbly, hand-held video, went

viral; before the flight even took off and within hours, ignited an international storm of protest.

United's initial attempt at spin, was that this flight was overbooked and they needed four volunteers to deplane. Time-limited vouchers, redeemable only on United, were offered as an incentive. While three passengers passively agreed to this fable, no one else "volunteered" and so, according to United's spokesperson, a "random computer search" selected Dr. Dao. In a highly dubious, airline version, of our age-old, American musical-chairs game, he was chosen as the loser who must relinquish his seat. When this chosen one protested, concerned that he was "flying while Asian", explained he was a doctor who needed to return home in time to see patients, held a confirmed reservation for a paid-for seat, and therefore refused to "volunteer". This quite understandable protest was later described by a tone deaf United CEO as "disruptive and belligerent", and therefore his airline "had no choice", in fluent fascist, Orwellian newspeak, but to "re-accommodate" their latest inconvenient passenger. As for other future choices, my darker side imagines, that our ubiquitous cost-effective experts might well advocate that all subsequent United and all other aircraft be refurbished with remote controlled, trap door, rapid ejection devices to be installed directly beneath all coach-class seating. Therefore, no more need to assault and forcibly drag any and all non-compliant passengers off in plain sight, along with the accompanying risks of negative publicity.

Corporate controlled MSM media has dutifully reported this disturbing incident with Dr. Dao and that this innocent physician was "re-accomodated ". Yes, of course, he was and in a manner similar to the "re-accomodated" extradition of El Chapo from Mexico. And, pay no attention to the actual fact that United's overbooking story was an "alternative fact" (bold-faced lie). In reality, flight 3411 was not overbooked; and this situation was simply one in which United felt entitled to bump four paying passengers in order to accommodate four of their crew-members scheduled to travel to a connecting flight. Another challenge to the alternative fact, of United's "no choice" defense for their resort to violence, is simply an obvious option in that their crew members could have easily been transported by van or charter-plane to their required destination.

Perhaps our increasing numbers of awake and aware can agree and insist that this "no choice" and "no other option" defense for often lethal violence by law-enforcement operatives is no longer acceptable within our so-called democratic society, where suspects are considered legally innocent until granted a fair trial. This is becoming an increasingly serious issue which I have previously addressed in "No Other Option?" (**Lightning On The Horizon**, 2016). In this case, the "suspect", Dr. Dao, was guilty of nothing other than rationally protesting an obvious injustice.

Nevertheless, by refusing to "volunteer" Dr. Dao was summarily accosted by three uniformed thugs who proceed to inflict a series of injuries which resulted in his "re-accommodation" in Chicago's Advocate Lutheran General Hospital. Now a patient, this innocent physician was minus his two front teeth, as well as a broken nose, shattered sinuses and serious concussion, together with confusion and temporary memory loss; (trauma). In addition, he will likely be in need of facial reconstruction surgery.

Upon viewing this disturbing video and hearing Dr. Dao's agitation and terrified screams, as a trauma specialist, I suspected that this incident may have been a re-activation of a previous unresolved trauma. After being knocked unconscious, and hauled off the aircraft, Dr. Dao somehow managed to break free of his assailants and in a clearly disoriented state re-boarded, muttering, "I have to go home" and "please, just kill me". He was then again removed on a stretcher by medics who proceeded to clean up the copious blood spatters, while the remaining passengers waited to re-board for a delayed departure.

It has been my experience, with over a half-century of trauma work, that traumas tend to happen on the anniversaries of previous, unresolved traumas, especially those involving a separation or violent dis-connection. Here it is interesting to note that Dr. Dao's ordeal with a violent dis-connection happened during the month of April. As we have since learned, he spent his teens and late twenties during the height of the Vietnamese War; and that he felt that his United abduction-experience was even more terrifying than his last minute escape during the chaotic fall of Saigon in April 1975.

During this horrific war trauma debacle, thousands of American soldiers and Vietnamese scrambled to flee by helicopter and boats, as more than 150,000 North

Vietnamese gathered at the city gates. Small wonder that Dr. Dao was disoriented and "wanted to go home". More information on trauma and potential re-traumatization on anniversary dates is available in my **Trauma: Time, Space and Fractals** (2012) and the Youtube interview: "Na rubu znanosti", filmed in Zagreb in English and Croatian. (link: www.acst-international.com).

While adding insult to injury, the "Friendly Skies of United", did not bother to make sure that Dr. Dao's luggage was unloaded, nor that of his wife, a pediatrician, and both were subsequently left without their belongings all during his hospitalization, and then belatedly shipped to the wrong address. While this couple were understandably media-shy, Crystal Dao Pepper M.D., one of their 5 children, (4 of whom are also doctors), issued this heartfelt statement:

"We hope, in the future, that nothing happens again, what happened to my Dad, a wonderful father and loving grandfather, and to other human beings".

Before long, this sorry episode provided an abundance of satirical tweets, "United Airlines: Pay for the seating. Stay for the beating." "You carry on. We carry off", "Board in peace. Leave in pieces", " U.A.: now serving punch," "Red Eye and Black Eye flights available", "The pilot has turned on the no passenger sign", Unseat, beat, repeat" and "United: We put the hospital in hospitality".

Needless to say, this viral video provided golden manna for our late night comedians including Jimmy Kimmel, who issued a satirical commercial for United Airlines as a smiling hostess assures that "We will beat your face so bloody that you can use it as a floatation device." Southwest Airlines was quick to respond with their new slogan: "We beat the competition, not you". If there is any good news for United's "Friendly Skies", it is likely that this fiasco will solve their overbooking problem.

Nevertheless, for the Dao family, their nightmare continued as their hometown **Courier Journal** newspaper published (a well paid for?) character assassination, hit-piece suggesting all manner of shady shenanigans in the physician's past, including an alleged second career as a professional gambler. In the opportunistic rush to publish, it is likely that this article was not properly vetted, given that David Dao is a common name. The maligned passenger is David Thanh Duc Dao and the gambler with an alleged criminal past is David Anh Duy Dao. In any event, this victim's past is

not in any way relevant to the fact that he was unjustly brutalized; and passivity in the face of injustice leads to further oppression.

Whatever the truth in this case, an attempt to smear an innocent passenger who dared to voice a legitimate protest is in keeping with our all too pervasive, high and mighty, "blame the victim" culture. Blaming the unfortunate Dr. Dao is much akin to those proverbial rape victims with a "promiscuous past" who were either lying or "asking for it". Or those "unpatriotic" unruly peaceful protesters who deserved to get clobbered, pepper-sprayed and dowsed with water or sound cannons and worse: Kent State, U.C. Davis, Ferguson, and Standing Rock.

Our situation is such that there will always be those who persist in their belief that bad things only happen to other people, that our world is just and safe for the righteous; and misfortune is only visited upon those who somehow deserve to suffer; either through sin, bad karma, sexual preference, gender-identity, or by belonging to the wrong race, religion, political affiliation, or minority. Such firm convictions require no empathy for those unfortunate "others". While there was no shortage of commentary on the United incident on social media and comments sections, I found it disheartening to read so many mean-spirited entries blaming Dr. Dao for over-reacting, bringing the beating on himself; for not leaving quietly, exaggerating his injuries for financial gain, a clown who deserved what he got, and more than a few, Ugly American entreaties to "Go back to Vietnam". Upon reading these latest manifestations of our culture of cruelty, my heart hurts.

As troubling as all of this is, the Dao family's humiliating ordeal was not a one-off happenstance; as many, if not most of us who frequently fly can testify to many other abuses which never make it into the mainstream media. However, this unfortunate episode has at least served to focus some much-needed attention upon the multiple and increasing dangers of militarized corporate fascism in many aspects of modern life. Any and all who wish or need to travel by air are now required to adapt to our post-9/11 new, normal TSA gauntlets where all passengers are treated as suspected terrorists who must be radiated, and microwaved (millimeter wave scanners) with their persons and belongings thoroughly searched.

Pregnant women, elderly, children and disabled are often singled out for "enhanced" genital-groping pat-downs; along with anyone else who looks or acts "different". Cell-

phones and laptops can and will be often searched and even confiscated without due recourse and some air carriers have banned in-flight computers altogether. Just recently, girls were refused boarding onto a United flight because they were wearing leggings. No really!

If one actually makes it onto an overpriced aircraft, which is never a sure thing, given the fact that official figures show that over a half-million passengers were "routinely" bumped by major U.S. carriers last year. (New China TV, April 12, 2017). Once onboard your airline's feudal class assignment system of peerage and steerage, coach class travelers are relegated to sardine-sized seats, some of which don't recline, shrinking legroom, with air-quality adjusted to Death Valley desert levels of 5-10% humidity. Experiences within these mobile incarceration aluminum tubes are likely to include, limited access to restrooms, incessant "passenger safety" and other needlessly repetitive non-smoking announcements, informing us about the weather, estimated time to reach our cruising altitude, as well as unseen cities and other interesting sites that we are much too far above to actually see. Blankets and pillows often cost extra while over-priced alcohol is an often needed resource in order to wash down limited, ersatz food offerings.

Duly stuffed back into coach, we find none of those microwave heated mini-hot towels and warm gooey chocolate chip cookie offerings available to our betters up front. While I could go on, and by now, you have probably heard more than enough horror stories of passengers long stranded on runway tarmacs, forbidden to deplane, required to endure failing heat or cooling air-systems, lack of water, overflowing toilets, pregnant women, screaming babies, frightened hungry children and so on. Small wonder that we have ever increasing levels of air-rage incidents (UK guardian, April 11, 2017).

While it is clear that some version of an airline-passenger's Bill of Rights is sorely needed, long overdue, and nothing of the sort is likely to pass through our corporate-controlled bought-and-paid-for legislature and current administration; as well as our current mode of media-distracted "go along to get along", just change the app, solution to everything; is not likely to end anytime soon. Nevertheless, in view of multiple injustices suffered by Dr. Dao, his family and countless others, it just may be

time for our remaining awake and concerned to review those now timeless words of Pastor Martin Niemöller's Holocaust era warning: First they came...

Here he clearly dared to argue against a clueless apathy that leads to violence and for the moral interconnectedness of all of us within our seemingly diverse human family. And, yes, they did come for him and unlike so many others, he managed to survive along with his timeless message.

First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out -

Because I was not a Socialist -

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out -

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out -

Because I was not a Jew -

Then they came for me - and there was no one left to speak for me.