

## Have You Seen These Stories?

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[This post relates to this previous post: I Don't Understand the Outrage (Dec. 20th, 2014)]

A trashy tabloid news program recently featured two segments I thought were worth commenting on. One showed a video I'm sure we've all seen by now, with a 54-year-old lady at a pharmacy being yanked to the ground by a younger lady whom, we're told, was upset because the older lady had asked her to put on a mask. The second one was a very brief clip I've only seen one time, where a man wearing very little clothing is clinging on to the hood of a semi-truck (or the bonnet of a lorry, for some readers :)) as it sped and swerved down the road.

The first story has gotten a lot of attention, and I'd like to point something out for anyone who may not have watched the clip carefully. It's been presented on every news show I've seen as a clear-cut case of aggression by a "non-masker" against a basically innocent and probably frail woman who simply asked her to wear a mask inside. The older lady walks with a cane, and we're also told she had a recent liver transplant thus is especially vulnerable to Covid. She's framed as the reasonable and socially responsible victim of a younger, more rebellious person. There also seems to be an unspoken subtext, with the older lady — whose leg was broken — appearing "white", while the younger aggressor appears "black", a dynamic that's surely seized upon by many who are inclined toward backlash against the recent anti-racist protests: "Oh, lookee here. Is another uppity negro girl violently assaulting a vulnerably white woman who just asked her to do the right thing." Granted, no news I've seen has explicitly pushed that narrative, but does anyone really believe that no one has taken notice?

Here's the thing, though — if you watch the soundless video carefully, it sure doesn't look like the takedown victim was so innocent and reasonable, nor the aggressor so irrationally violent. For one thing, the younger lady clearly isn't against masks, since she seems to have lowered hers just seconds before the encounter. She doesn't look like an "anti-masker" seeking trouble. As for the older lady, contrary to the dominant narrative, she doesn't appear to have calmly "asked" anything, but instead to have immediately recoiled with histrionic exaggeration, as if to theatrically cash in her virtue points at the other lady's expense. If there were sound, I'd bet we'd hear some equally unmeasured shrieks of remonstration. So, of course the younger lady became defensive — how not?

And yes, I get it, she's at high risk, and she uses a cane... but what did she do with that cane within 3 seconds? She thrust it at the other lady! Being vulnerable doesn't necessarily excuse being obnoxious or antagonistic, but even if it did it'd still make more sense to be level-headed or even gracious when you want someone to do something for your benefit (whether or not you're completely right).

I imagine that younger lady felt unduly attacked, so when the <sup>cane</sup> cane came at her along with the words, she instinctively grabbed it and pulled. The older lady held tight, also instinctively, and unfortunately she ended up with a broken leg, but from the footage, she just doesn't quite look blameless to me. In fact, the only thing here that appears to be black & white, apart from the cultural labels attached to the participants, is that all this harm could've been avoided just by rejecting "my team" vs. "your team" thinking, and all the drama that comes with it by default.

The other little story I mentioned is sort of related, I think, and it mostly boils down to a single comment, from my perspective. The driver of that big truck tells us that he sped along, trying to shake a nearly naked man off of his hood like a scene from an 80's T.V. cop show, because the man climbed on after first trying to flag him down, appearing "bloody and frantic". Bloody and frantic, he says, and trying to get the truck to stop, yet the driver's response is to... to speed up?? To fling the man to the asphalt from a moving vehicle? What the HELL kind of instinct is that — Someone clearly needs your help, and you more or less try to kill him to avoid finding out what's wrong? Then somehow, in a world where no one bats an eye at this kind of "pragmatic individualism", we still shake our heads and wonder why so many things are so screwed up. Couldn't we just try a little less pedal-to-the-metal see-no-evil/hear-no-evil, and maybe occasionally ask... "Hey, what's wrong? How can I help?"

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"Empathy is the antidote to righteousness"

- Quote by ??