

FFBC

First Friday News & Views

Monthly Newsletter of the *First Friday Breakfast Club, Inc.*

June 2020

Volume 25

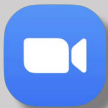
Issue 6

The next FFBC meeting is
Friday, June 5,
2020
7:00 a.m.



FFBC Meeting Location:

ONLINE ZOOM
MEETING



ZOOM MEETING
Login Directions

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FFBC Website:
www.ffbc-iowa.org



We Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet

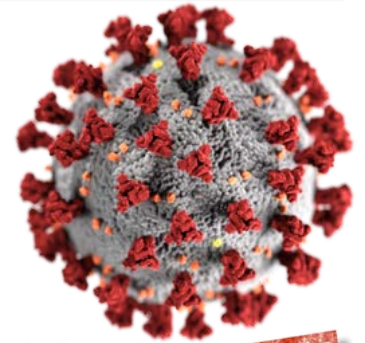
by Jonathan Wilson

At this point the Covid-19 virus is stalking all of us. It has already killed more U.S. citizens in one month than were killed in twenty years of war in Vietnam. Until there's an effective vaccine and people actually get vaccinated, it will continue to stalk us, spreading exponentially until most, if not all of us, are infected. Projections already estimate the eventual infection of 80-90% of the entire U.S. population, or roughly 264,000,000 to 297,000,000 victims before it's over. The death rate from Covid-19 infection is about ten times that for the "regular" seasonal flu, or about 1% of those infected. So, the Trump Administration's estimate of 100,000 to 240,000 dead Americans appears to be conservative, at best. Obscenely conservative. Laughably so, if it weren't so dire and disturbing beyond description.

I'm not so much interested in flattening a curve as I am in avoiding infection altogether. My chances of success there are not great without a vaccine. I'm doing all the recommended things: socially distancing to the point of almost total isolation, wearing a mask and gloves when I'm in public, cleaning groceries and medicine bottles before shelving them. All of it. But, until there's a vaccine, one slip-up could be all that it takes for me to be infected.



The eventual vaccine is at least months away. In the meantime, infections will continue and, with the foolish "re-opening" of the economy that's underway, there's bound to be an increase in the rate of infection, aggravated by the reappearance of the "regular" seasonal flu next fall. From the perspective of our national, physical health, it is not a pretty picture.



With a vaccine, which I most assuredly intend to get, my chances of success will be better than the anti-vacs crowd and those foolish enough to believe that their faith or their God will protect them from infection. In the struggle between faith and facts, I'll opt for the latter every time. For me, faith is reserved for the point where facts run out; it's not to be a substitute for facts.

[continued on page two]

["We Aint Seen Nothin' Yet" / cont. from page 1]

But it's worse; consider our economic circumstances. The unemployment rate in the U.S. is, by Trump Administration projections, headed toward 25%, which would exceed the unemployment rate during the Great Depression in 1933. Seriously, I'm not making this up. That has prompted the federal government to send money – lots of it -- to every American making less than \$99,000 a year, plus \$500 for every dependent child. Plus \$600 per week to augment the unemployment compensation being paid by state governments. It's borrowing trillions of dollars in order to do that; it's not like the federal government had some extra cash sitting around to use on a rainy day. The federal budget hadn't been in the black since the end of the Clinton Administration.

The current federal government's budget was already in deficit and the national debt was already increasing by at least two trillion dollars as a result of previous tax cuts benefitting the wealthy and corporations. For-profit corporations have been reaping and distributing profits, and doing it "paycheck-to-paycheck." All they're "for" is profit.

Yes, it turns out that for-profit corporations are into capitalism when there are profits, and into socialism when things go south.



But it's going to get even worse on the economics front. We ain't seen nothin yet. Not only is there likely to be another unfunded, cash give-away in the magnitude of trillions of borrowed (or merely printed) dollars targeted for hospitals and state and local governments (the ones who pay for police, fire, and other local services), the money already sent to individuals is not taxable!!!

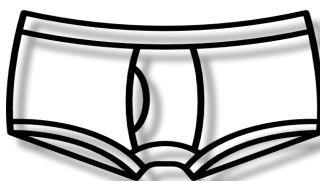
Think about that for a moment. With a federal budget already in the red and the national debt already increasing at an astronomical rate, tax revenues are going to decline precipitously this year and next and who-knows-how-long into the future as a result of slowed economic activity in the U.S. and nontaxable tax credits to most Americans. I wouldn't consider myself an economist, even though I did well in my one economics course in college many years ago, I do know how to add, subtract, and balance my checkbook.

Do the math.

Things are going to get worse – lots worse – before things get better. That's just the fact and, like I said, I recognize, and am guided by, the facts.



Briefs & Shorts:



Thanks to **Scott Kuknyo** for introducing our May speaker, retired federal judge Mark W. Bennett. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter production editor. Thanks to **Ryan Weidner** for his work as our technology guru. Thanks to **Nicholas Williams** for managing our website. *Thanks to all our contributors to the monthly newsletter!*

A special thank-you to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the Donor Direct program of United Way. The contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.

Our annual fundraising effort is underway to fund our scholarship program. To date we have raised over \$275,000 for scholarships that are awarded to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ issues in their schools and communities. Please consider a contribution on line or by sending a check.

The next copy deadline for the FFBC newsletter will be **May 15, 2020.**

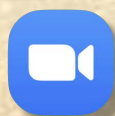
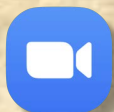
If you have something on your mind, put it on paper and get it to me by the copy deadline. It'll be interesting, good therapy, or both. Caring is sharing.

Don't Miss the
DEADLINE!



Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. **Book donations are always welcome.** Thanks to **Scott Kuknyo** for helping coordinate the book exchange.





June Meeting

ZOOM



Login Instructions

The IN-PERSON meeting of the First Friday Breakfast Club scheduled for Friday, June 5, will **NOT** take place because of the coronavirus pandemic. Difficult times call for creative solutions. **We do plan on having a VIRTUAL meeting instead. Below are the instructions for your participation.**

To prepare for the virtual meeting that will be conducted over Zoom, it is recommended members install the free Zoom application. To get started go to <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/categories/200101697> and follow the instructions under "Getting Started on Windows and Mac." It is recommended this be done before Friday morning. During the process you'll be prompted to create a free account.

To join the meeting Friday morning, either click on the link sent to you in an email from Jonathan OR open a web browser and type in this link <https://zoom.us/j/394244067?pwd=aUIEYm1FZGpUYk5pVFpZVWtrODViZz09> and follow the prompts on the screen.

For Zoom-savvy members, it will be much easier to join the meeting with:

Meeting ID: 394 244 067

Password: 021481

To join the meeting to hear the audio only through a phone, dial one of the two numbers below and input the Meeting ID, **394 244 067** when prompted.

Audio Only (no video):

929-205-6099 or 312-626-6799

Regardless how the meeting is joined, please ensure the microphone/phone is muted.

For those not familiar with Zoom, the website has easy to follow information on how to get started and use Zoom:

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/categories/200101697>.

Anyone who has announcements that need to be made, please get those to me prior to Friday using:
jonathanwilson@davisbrownlaw.com.



June
Speaker:



Ryan Wise



Our virtual speaker in June will be Ryan Wise, Director of the Iowa Department of Education. You won't want to miss this. You are also encouraged to invite some of your friends to attend!! Provide the name(s) of any anticipated guest(s) so we can have name tags for them at the registration desk.

First Friday Breakfast Club

June Scholarships



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Here Comes The Judge

by Bruce Carr

Our guest speaker on Friday morning, May 1, 2020, was retired federal judge Mark W. Bennett, who introduced himself as a lifelong crusader against bias – an iniquity with which he was sure his audience of gay and bisexual men had some experience. The meeting was conducted virtually, over Zoom.

“As a federal district judge in Iowa,” he noted, “I have sentenced a staggering number of low-level drug addicts to long prison terms. This is not justice.” The majority of his cases involved non-violent crime, Bennett said: drugs, guns, and immigration violations. But mandatory minimum sentences limited his judicial discretion. Another example of mandated bias was the one-hundred-to-one disparity in cocaine sentences between crack cocaine (favored by blacks) and powder (favored by whites); when Judge Bennett refused to apply that ratio – offering to reduce it to something more rational – he was reversed by the Eighth Circuit Court. (Fortunately, the US Supreme Court in turn reversed the Eighth.)

A particularly thrilling highlight of Bennett’s presentation was his description of his project, after decades of handing down judgments, to understand sentencing and incarceration from the other side of the bench, to discover the viewpoint of those people he had had in his courtrooms. “I’ve always been scared by prisons,” he said, but he nevertheless sought out in prison those he’d sentenced that were willing to meet, and interviewed them mostly one-on-one about their experience with the federal “justice” system. One example of a result from all this impressive work is a recent paper with the instructive title: *Looking Criminal and the Presumption of Dangerousness: Afrocentric Facial Features, Skin Tone, and Criminal Justice*.

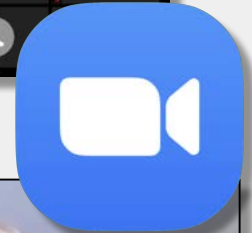
It was an engaging and gratifying morning. ***If you click on the Speakers tab at our Web site, <ffbc Iowa.org>, you can listen to a complete audio recording of Judge Bennett’s remarks***, and of the Q&A which followed, during which Bennett noted, for example, that it is unconscionable to make workers who are afraid of contracting the Coronavirus at their jobs to lose their employment benefits for not working.



Meeting
conducted
via Zoom



Meeting conducted
via Zoom



Mark W. Bennett was born in Milwaukee in 1950, and became an Iowan after earning his Bachelor of Arts degree at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter MN in 1972 and his Juris Doctor degree from Drake University Law School in 1975. That same year he started work as a lawyer in a Des Moines private practice that would last for over 15 years, specializing in employment law and discrimination, First-Amendment litigation, civil rights and civil liberties litigation, federal criminal defense, and representation of licensed professionals in ethics issues. During most of that time he also served as general counsel to the Iowa Civil Liberties Union, besides working at Drake’s Legal Ethics Clinic, teaching law at Drake, the University of Iowa College of Law, the Nebraska College of Law, the University of Hawaii William S. Richardson College of Law, Western Illinois, and the University of South Dakota. He also served as a special prosecutor for the Committee of Professional Ethics and Conduct of the Iowa State Bar.

From 1991, Bennett worked as a US magistrate judge for the US District Court for the Southern District of Iowa for three years, and in August 1994 he was confirmed by the US Senate to a seat on the US District Court for the Northern District of Iowa. From 1999 to 2006, he served as chief judge of that court, and in 2015 he assumed senior status, retiring from active judicial service in March of 2019. In retirement, he has accepted the post of director of Drake University’s Institute for Justice Reform & Innovation, which will also involve teaching aspiring lawyers -- perhaps judges. He can be reached at Drake by phone at 515/271-2908 and by e-mail at mark.bennett@drake.edu.

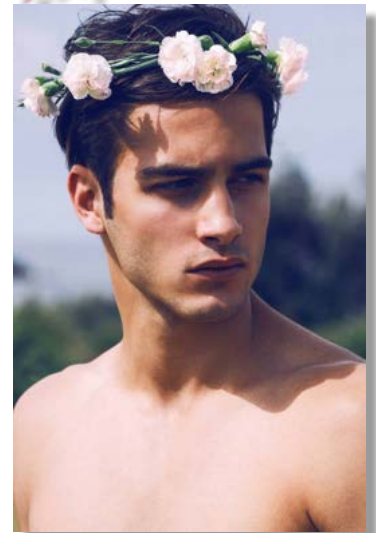
COVID-19 and LGBTQ+ Spaces

By Jordan Duesenberg

COVID-19 has obviously changed everything for everyone and everything. The one thing that my friends and I constantly say to one another via Zoom chats or messages in between memes helping us cope with the shitty hand we've all been dealt, is something along the lines of, "When things get back to normal, we're going to go crazy!" We're going to hop bar-to-bar, hit on every man in sight, and dance the night away like the good ol' days." But one thing I can't get out of my head is, "What are Queer spaces going to look like after all of this?"

It's no mystery that a number of small businesses are struggling and may not make it out of this alive. In a lot of cases, the majority of spaces for the LGBTQ+ community are still centered around nightlife. Whether they're nightclubs, bars, theaters, dance floors, etc., most of these spaces were the first to close and will likely be the last to open, even as cities and states are starting to ease some of their restrictions. Even when they start to open up a bit, what will that look like? Until we get some type of vaccine for COVID-19, I can't imagine bars or clubs allowing more than a small number (likely up to 50 depending on the size of the space) of people in at a time; even then with intense requirements. How will those spaces survive with such a small clientele? That's also assuming that people will be ready to go out again. But, let's say people are ready to go out, but these venues are limited in space, or the space they go to doesn't fit their vibe, or what they're looking for; these people are likely not going to even bother. Without enough clientele or without government support, a lot of these spaces don't have a chance of survival. I also have a hard time believing the government cares about saving LGBTQ+ spaces, especially in large cities, where that real estate would probably benefit them a lot more if it were luxury apartments, artisanal bakeries, or whatever neo-yuppie replacement you can think of. This is especially true for what some people might call "seedier" spaces (like bathhouses or even leather bars) that I'm sure some cities would rather get rid of.

I've been worried about the demise of LGBTQ+ bars and neighborhoods in general for awhile for a number of reasons. With COVID-19 being a threat to small businesses everywhere, I feel like it's especially detrimental to our community's spaces. I don't have the answers, and maybe I'm just being a worrywart; what I do know is that "getting back to normal," may never be the "normal" we've grown accustomed to and enjoyed over the years.



On a lighter note, there was a woman who asked her husband whether she had gotten fat while sheltering in place at home. He replied, "Well, before, you weren't all that slender." The obituary attributed his death to the Covid-19 virus.



Swallow

A Film Review by Mark Turnage



Masterful psychological horror in film is a careful balance of slow-burn setup and shocking reveals, primed to disturb and deconstruct expectations. Yet a poorly executed plot twist can ruin hours of meticulous world-building—or the setup itself can become tedious enough that the payoff is worthless. With Carlo Mirabella-Davis' *Swallow*, one woman's development of pica, a real-life compulsion to consume inedible items, becomes a radical feminist revolt against her gilded prison. Its success at creating scenes of sheer discomfort, along with its superb pacing, provides a compelling and transfixing feminist slant to the "social horror" genre pioneered by such thrillers as *Get Out* and *Us* that sticks with you well after the final scene.

Stay-at-home housewife Hunter (Haley Bennett) appears to live a comfortable life -- her husband is heir-apparent to the high-stakes family business in New York City; their residence is a spacious, posh lake house with cute but kitschy 70's décor and enough space where she can continue her work as an illustrator from home. Yet we start to realize that Hunter's surroundings are actually an emotionally stifling façade. Between her aloof father-in-law's attitude toward her, and her mother-in-law's barely disguised class contempt lurking beneath her faux generosity, Hunter also has a husband who mostly sees her as a social placeholder -- every successful CEO should have a sexy, supportive wife, right? With her life eerily similar to living in quarantine, and her social network limited to those who have little care or understanding for her as a person, Hunter begins to develop pica, an obsession with eating nonedible objects, and impulsively chooses to eat a marble found during housework as an act of rebellion against her less-than-empathetic husband. Hunter's reaction is an almost drug-like euphoria; to her, it's her quiet "fuck you" to everyone trying to manage her and treat her like an object to be maintained rather than a woman to be respected.

But it's the social discomfort that's where Mirabella-Davis' film really excels. In one scene, her husband invites over his CEO buddies to their home for drinks. By this point, Hunter's pica has escalated to more disturbing items like batteries and tacks after discovering she's unexpectedly pregnant. This self-destructive behavior is unsettling by itself, but shortly after trying to hide a bloody regurgitated tack and staining her expensive "hostess" outfit, a drunk party guest propositions her outside the bathroom within view of her own husband. The guest refuses to take no for an answer, and it's only through some nerve-racking negotiation she's able to furtively talk him down to a supremely awkward hug. Calling for her husband's help clearly isn't an option to Hunter: being raped is the lesser risk than triggering her husband's wrath by embarrassing him. This scene encapsulates well-executed psychological horror; it's disturbing on multiple levels, culminating in the audience feeling just as trapped as the main character is.

The subtext of mental illness as a form of feminist rebellion seems problematic until Mirabella-Davis introduces a past trauma of Hunter's late in the second act that functions both as behavior explanation and emotional catharsis, and removes any doubt that this is a female-empowered social horror film. Hunter's social position is so corrosive, it's costing her own identity, mental health, and sense of self-preservation. It's not until she's able to escape her social circle and confront this trauma that she starts to rebuild her sense of self, in a powerful and controversial ending sequence that left me floored. While not for the faint of heart, *Swallow* is one of those 'can't-look-away' films that unpacks the cost of emotional subjugation expertly, while also creating skin-crawling scripting worthy of unforgettable psychological horror. See it, and be prepared to wince a lot.



Dumping Trump

By Bruce Sanders Lehnertz

I currently live in Des Moines, Iowa, where I've lived most of my life. I'm standing up against the Presidency of Donald Trump. I am NOT here to make any political statements. I AM here, because our nation is being mismanaged. HORRIBLY mismanaged. I also believe that that I have something to contribute to this conversation, and I'd like to tell you why.

I think knowing a little about my background may contribute to understanding why I'm making this statement, and, more importantly, why I think YOU should join me in our fight to regain our place in the world. I am retired from a 42-year career in financial services — 23 of those years dedicated to financing commercial real estate across the USA, meeting local officials, real estate developers, owners and investors, investing a total of about \$3 billion. A big part of that 22-year career was working for the world's largest private pension fund, financing, and occasionally purchasing commercial properties as investments for the fund. I was really good at it, too. Being able to walk away from a deal was at least as important as working hard to make a deal happen. Sponsorship was one of the most critical factors. Who's behind the property we are looking to finance, or invest in?

One of our opportunities we sought after was to provide financing for the hotels and casinos that our, now President Donald Trump was developing in Atlantic City, New Jersey. My manager, recognized universally as a leader in the domestic commercial real estate investment arena, arranged a meeting with now-President Donald Trump. The meeting didn't last very long, but the impression did. Ahead of that meeting, a typical exercise was doing some research on our "sponsors," those individuals who were going to be significant voices in the acquisition, development, and management of the property with whom we were hoping to invest.

Donald Trump is not a guy that makes it hard to get the necessary discovery. He'll tell you everything. Everything he wants you to know, anyway. The trick is to figure out how much of it is true, and how much is just puffing up his chest. Donald got his fortune from his father. His father, Fred, started building apartment buildings in Queens, and expanded to building barracks and apartments along the East Coast during WWII. Fred Trump frequently came up with excuses to not pay the contractors or employees who worked on his buildings. He passed that trait on to his son, who STILL hasn't paid contractors and construction workers who built Trump Tower on 5th Avenue in New York City. That's who Donald Trump is.

Who is President Trump? He's ignorant about virtually EVERYTHING associated with government, the presidency, and the founding documents of our Republic. In his campaign against Hillary Clinton, he asked during a debate, "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you can find the 30,000 emails." The whole email fiasco turned out to be a nothingburger. Then he asked the Ukraine to launch attacks against Biden.

Bottom line: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the triad division of power that has always guided our nation toward a BEST solution to our challenges, is now in imminent danger of collapsing under the administration that values self-enrichment — spending lots of our money for his golf outings at clubs that he personally owns. No President before 45 has so blatantly violated the role of the office for personal gain.

Donald Trump does not value, or uphold, the values of our nation, those values encapsulated in our founding documents. And now, with Donald Trump facing a legacy of thousands of Americans falling to Covid-19, how do we respond? There is a primary on June 2. We MUST make Joni Ernst a one-term Senator and work to flip the Senate. We must make sure that Trump is a one-term President.

DUMP TRUMP

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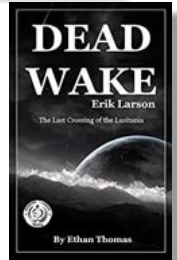


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First Friday
Breakfast Club, Inc.

Two Book Reviews of Author Erik Larson

by Steve Person



One of the good things to come from this self-isolation is the time it gives me to read -- a lot. Two of the books I have finished are by the same author, Erik Larson. I first read his *Devil in the White City* a number of years ago. It chronicled the story of a serial killer who operated during the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Larson has the knack of writing about a major event, such as the 1893 World's Fair, and weaving into his narrative details that at first seem irrelevant but, ultimately, end up having a major impact on the outcome.

The first book I read was Larson's current bestseller, *The Splendid and the Vile*. It covers the first years of Winston Churchill's Prime Ministerial Administration, 1940-41. I have read many biographies of Churchill, and any author who takes on such a monumental figure as Churchill has his work cut out for him/her. What to include? What to leave out? What to emphasize? Larson, fortunately, limited this book to a specific time. One of the main sources he consulted was the diary of Churchill's seventeen-year-old daughter, Mary. This is where Larson is so good at weaving into his writings the thoughts of a young girl amid the backdrop of a major event—The Blitz of England's major cities, especially London. As I read of the incessant nightly air raids, I was struck at the resilience of the English people. Despite major damage to so many areas, the people stood strong and supported largely what their Prime Minister asked them to do. Compare that to the wreck we have leading our country at this time and the stupidity of some people who demonstrate at state capitols while toting guns and helping to spread the virus. They have no notion of sacrifice.

Thank goodness for Amazon! As I was finishing up that book, I ordered Larson's *Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania*. Again, he laces the lives of some of the passengers on the ill-fated liner with deftness, consulting diaries and official accounts of the disaster. The U-boat captain who launched the torpedo that smashed onto the starboard side of the liner contrasts with the steady and calming influence of the Lusitania's Captain Turner. The sinking of this ship was a web of ill-timed events, any one of which that, if it had not happened would, probably have allowed the "pride of the Cunard Line" to make a safe crossing into Liverpool. The Lusitania, more than eight hundred feet long, sank in just eighteen minutes. The place where the torpedo hit the ship ten feet below the ocean's surface managed to knock out all the communications aboard except the wireless that sent out constant SOS signals. While the officers on the bridge tried to stop the ship, they couldn't because of the damage, so it continued its voyage while sinking. This meant the lifeboats could not be lowered properly, and many passengers didn't have their life jacket. And, even if they did have them, put them on improperly. "Of the Lusitania's 1,959 passengers and crew, only 764 survived: the total deaths was 1,195. The three German stowaways brought the total to 1,198. Of 33 infants on board, only 6 survived. Over 600 passengers were never found. Among the dead were 123 Americans."

Of all the wars I have ever studied, World War I was the most senseless one up to that time. It brought in the concept of TOTAL WAR, meaning not even civilians were exempt.

Both books are beautifully written.