

# Virus

## **Under the microscope: Examining the COVID -19 virus plus introducing and naming another**

by Robert Hicks

For the historical record COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020. Since then, many regions around the world – including all Canadian provinces and territories – have declared states of emergency and implemented strict public health measures effectively putting cities under lock-down.

The Archives & Special Collections, Brock University Library states that the world's reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic is historic and they have teamed up with the Digital Scholarship Lab at Brock University to produce this COVID-19 archive. They hope that sometime in the near and far future, students, authors, and other curious people will be able to use the archive materials to retell the history of this challenging time.

The COVID-19 Archive project has requested submissions saying that “only your words, your means of expression, your truth are what is important here.” COVID-19 is providing the world with a teachable moment. Stories are the most powerful tool we have for increasing understanding and building engagement with complex issues.

American Author Joseph Campbell said: "If you're going to have a story, have a big story, or none at all." The following is a big story - not big in size – big in importance.

Warning: The following is a scary story because it talks about bad viruses and horrible attitudes. For some reason, everyone loves a good scary story, including children. Children of every age from toddlers to teens, love to shiver in response to something creepy or scary, so please make sure the following is appropriate for the age and emotional maturity of the kids listening to the story.

This story may be a bit scary, but more importantly it is being written to educate people by addressing a very important topic - our human relations and our future.

This is a story about 7 slides examined under a microscope in a laboratory .

A microscope slide is a thin flat piece of glass, used to hold objects for examination under a microscope. Typically the “object” is mounted on the slide, and then both are inserted together in the microscope for viewing. This arrangement allows several slide-mounted objects to be quickly inserted and removed from the microscope, labelled, transported, and stored in appropriate slide cases or folders.

The date is April 25, 2020. The story begins in a Canadian Public Health Laboratory somewhere in Canada. Two lab research technicians are discussing the COVID-19 virus and Canada's response to it.

Both technicians are very experienced at microscopic examination, collecting and assessing samples and running different diagnostic tests. They know how to apply their advanced technical knowledge and skills to run the most recent technologies in their field. They are smart people. They have been in the business a long time. They have seen a lot of viruses. They know what they are doing.

The first technician admits to the second technician that the COVID-19 virus really scares him. While the majority of people who are infected by COVID-19 will not require hospitalization about 80 percent of cases appear to be mild. The virus has a remarkably high rate of severe, and even fatal, cases compared to the regular flu.

At first it was thought to have come to Canada on January 27th, after a man who had returned to Toronto from Wuhan, China, tested positive. It may be that it came from the US. It is difficult to be sure. However, in about 87 days, there were 42,100 confirmed cases and 2,147 deaths in Canada, and it only took about 48 days for all of Canada's provinces and territories to declare states of emergency.

**Tech #1 comments;** “This is really bad and we don't even know yet what the solutions might be. We have never seen anything like this before. – the entire world is going to have to come together as one to fight this.”

**Tech #2 agrees with him, but wants to reassure him and says;** “We shouldn't worry too much since already the world is showing a sense of community like nothing we have seen before. If we are lucky this pandemic might make our differences fade-away and our similarities become clearer and people will think less about fighting each other. That could be a very good thing. I prefer to be an optimist. It does not matter who finds the solutions, what matters is that we find them fast. We are at a rare moment in time when we are all together. I think the world will come together and we will beat this. We have to.”

**Tech #1 still very concerned and stressed says;** “I have been thinking a lot about this since it first hit the news. We are going to have to conquer this thing as fast as possible and we are going to have to face a messy aftermath economically. A lot of people will find themselves out of work because of this and many businesses will be hurt badly. However, trying to think on the bright side, I do think Canada is resilient. I think people will be willing to cooperate with each other and help each other to survive this. Our strong multicultural society has been working hard and getting along very well and it has to stay that way.”

**Tech #2 agrees with him again and says;** “In Canada there is a positive connectedness between people and the community and a focus on the common good. There seems to be a bond or ‘glue’ that binds people together in Canada. We all care about the overall health of the country and everybody wants to see everyone else be OK. When people need help in this country they can get it – people are willing to help each other out. We can get through this virus problem – don't worry.”

**Tech #1 says;** “I have been studying this - a healthy and resilient society is a society that wakes up every morning and asks itself - is today a day I ask help for help - or a day I offer help – and then decides, every day, to do both - a please help me and let me help you attitude every day. I think that describes Canada fairly well – a least I hope it does. Every citizen has a right to expect the assistance of society in times of need, if not by way of government action, then through a voluntary organization. It is just who we are now.”

**Tech #2 says;** “Yes that is true. But now because of COVID-19 every level of government will be on the hottest-of-hot-seats to deliver the economic and social assistance needed to take care of people and get them back to work. Let me read to you what Canada's minister of economic development Melanie Joy says in today's (April 25,2020) Hamilton Spectator.”

*“We stand at a unique juncture in Canadian history. More than ever, our decisions will ensure not just the success of our economy, but our communities. More than ever, the personal is political. More than ever, we must get this right. Canadians can rest assured that government has their backs. Our message to Canadian workers and business is clear: we're here with concrete measures and supports in all regions of our country. We'll be here for you in the weeks and months to come. And we'll get through this together.”*

“That was well said, but a lot is going to be expected from a lot of leaders who are going to need to put in lot of hours on this problem. They might get burned out by the stress. If they can't take the heat, maybe we should replace them with young people – after all the future of Canada is going to belong to them soon and they should be running the show as soon as possible. Canada will come through this – maybe different in some ways, or many ways - but we are strong and together we will be fine.”

**Tech #1 says;** “I wish I shared your confidence about that. Although I am proud of our multi-cultural society and Canada's world-wide reputation for tolerance and goodwill among all people, we do have problems that I have been thinking about; - problems with our human relations that could get in the way of a smooth recovery not only in Canada but around the entire world.

I have been doing some research and would appreciate it if you would take a look at something and give me your opinion. I have put together a slide-deck of 7 slides that I am very concerned about. Will you put them on that micro-scope-machine that you love so much for a very close-up look and tell me what you think?”

**Tech #2 says;** “Sure I'd be happy to, but now you are getting me scared. I hope it is not something like the COVID. Where is this slide-deck?”

**Tech #1 says;** “I will go and get them. I call the first 5 slides 'The Terrible Five'. The 6<sup>th</sup> slide is the scariest one of all and I have given it its own name. I have abbreviated the name to RPDBB-20, because the name I have given it is a big word that is 23 letters long. It is keeping me up at night. Some viruses have high mutation rates that allow especially fast evolution and this could be one of them. It could become very infectious and develop into its own kind of virus that could really mess up our future and be a big threat to all of mankind. To add a bit of suspense for you, I will hold back slide 7 until you have looked at the first 6. The first 5 are scary but slide 6 is very scary.

---

# Virus

## The Terrible Five – Slide 1

### Microscopes view of : **The Racism Virus**

Racist attitudes and beliefs are misconceptions about people based on perceived racial lines and are often founded on the fear of difference, including differences in customs, values, religion, physical appearance and ways of living and viewing the world. It destroys community cohesion and creates divisions in society. It violates principles of justice.

We need to do more to promote racial and ethnic harmony. As the diversity in the world continues to grow we need to do more to remedy general societal racism.

---

# Virus

## The Terrible Five – Slide 2

### Microscopes view of: **The Prejudice Virus**

Prejudice is when a person negatively prejudges another person or group without getting to know the beliefs, thoughts and feelings behind their words and actions. It is grounded in misconception, misunderstanding and inflexible generalizations.

Man is not born prejudiced; rather, prejudice is learned. Prejudice is a hostile attitude. It is a judgment that resists facts and ignores truth and honesty.

---

# Virus

## The Terrible Five – Slide 3

### Microscope view of: **The Discrimination Virus**

Discrimination is the unjust treatment of people, or treating someone as inferior based on their race, sex, national origin, age or other characteristics.

It can be either direct or indirect and include: harassment, 'unwanted conduct', with the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

It can also include victimization which occurs when someone suffers a 'detriment', a loss, disadvantage, damage or harm such as being left out and ignored, or being denied training or a promotion.

---

# Virus

## The Terrible Five – Slide 4

### Microscope view of: **The Bullying Virus**

Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour that is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. It includes the humiliation, intimidation and threatening of others, teasing, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments and taunting, spreading rumours, deliberately hurting another's reputation, hitting, pushing, stealing possessions and sexual assault. Bullying can cause anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, feelings of despair and loneliness, and it can destroy the lives of others.

---

# Virus

## The Terrible Five – Slide 5

### Microscope view of: **The Bigotry Virus**

Bigotry is the characteristic of a prejudiced person who is intolerant of opinions, lifestyles, or identities differing from their own. Bigotry is stronger than prejudice and is a more severe mindset of hatred that is often accompanied by discriminatory behaviour. It is arrogant and mean spirited.

Bigotry is the state of mind of a bigot: someone who, as a result of their prejudices, treats other people with hatred, contempt, and intolerance on the basis of a person's ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics.

---

### The conversation between the two techs resumes:

**Tech #2 says;** WOW! these are five very terrible viruses. Clearly we should be doing a lot more to address them. If the world can come together, so quickly, to fight COVID-19, why have we not been able to conquer these five viruses that have been with us for a long time?

**Tech #1 says;** Exactly – that is what I have been wondering about for a very long time. If we don't address them soon, they could mutate into slide 6, and then the world will have a much more difficult time dealing with the many problems we are sure to be confronted with in the future. Now take a look at slide 6, the scariest slide of all. After that I will show you some good news.

---

# Virus

## Microscope view of slide 6: A Possible New Virus

### The Raceprejdisbullybigotism Virus RPDBB - 20

Raceprejdisbullybigotism is a portmanteau word, which in linguistics is a blend of words formed by combining or morphing existing words that all relate to a singular concept.

The only reason I have given birth to this word, in this story, was to bring your attention to the words that I have called “The Terrible Five” to make you think about them more and realize how terribly wrong they are, because our society is not doing a good enough job addressing them.

It is also a neologism. A neologism (from Greek) means "new" "speech, utterance" and is a relatively recent or isolated term, word, or phrase that may be in the process of entering common use.

Raceprejdisbullybigotism (RPDBB) (-20 is for 2020) is the morphing of Racism, Prejudice, Discrimination, Bullying and Bigotry into one word that describes what could become a very dangerous disease of the human mind.

People who suffer from raceprejdisbullybigotism will see their daily reality connected to many of the ideas associated with racism, prejudice, discrimination, bullying and bigotry. When they live their lives thinking these thoughts their views can become an infectious virus and lead societies to the dark side of moral conviction were “oughts”, “shoulds” and “musts” to accomplish anything positive, can become can'ts, won'ts and will-nots that oppose everything. Thinking in this negative way and living with these terrible values can do great harm in our world.

PM Justin Trudeau has said *“We need to make sure we're all working together to change mindsets, to change attitudes, and to fight against bad habits that we have as a society.”*

I have named raceprejdisbullybigotism (RPDBB-20) because it represents the “bad habits” our Prime Minister was talking about. It has the potential to mutate into a very dangerous virus in society. We must keep in mind that mutations occur silently and spontaneously and can be induced by environmental factors. In the case of RPDBB-20 those environmental factors can be the stresses of economic hardships and the many stresses we are yet to experience with climate change.

The terrible five - Racism, Prejudice, Discrimination, Bullying and Bigotry are hurting our entire world in ways beyond what we imagine. They are getting in the way of our ability to live together in peace and harmony and they can prevent us from having a safe and healthy future.

**RPDBB-20 is a warning to society**

---



## Slide 7 - The Antidote for Raceprejudisbullybigotism

Where is Superman when we need him – and – what would Superman fight for now in the aftermath of COVID-19? Who on earth can we turn to in the year 2020?

My vote goes to 17 year old Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg (the world's most prominent climate activist) and her climate strike movement Fridays for Future. The youth of our world are now the new “Super-persons” for our times.

Fridays For Future says:

*“We are fighting for our future and our lives because they are directly threatened by the climate crisis and the ecological breakdown. We are taking action against it because we want to protect the beauty of the earth, the diversity of species and the lives of all beings. Our goal is to overcome the climate crisis and to create a society that lives in harmony with its fellow beings and its environment. Join us!”*

They also say: *“Our movement is independent of commercial interests and political parties and knows no borders. We strike because we care for our planet and for each other. We have hope that humanity can change, avert the worst climate disasters and build a better future. Every day there are more of us and together we are strong. Everyone is welcome. Everyone is needed. No one is too small to make a difference. Join us!”*

Before the Climate Action Summit, Greta had 4.5 million followers on Instagram. Now her followers' count is up to 10.2 million. There is no doubt that the youth of our world are now the new “Super-persons” for our times.

Greta's influence on the world stage has been described as the "Greta effect". She has received numerous honours and awards including: *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people and the youngest *Time* Person of the Year, inclusion in the Forbes list of The World's 100 Most Powerful Women (2019) and two consecutive nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize (2019 and 2020).



Greta has recently said; *“everyone must fight the climate crisis and coronavirus pandemic simultaneously and not allow the health crisis to delay action on cutting carbon emissions”*.

I agree. We should all agree!

Speaking at an event in New Zealand in May 2019, the 9<sup>th</sup> Secretary-General of the United Nations said his generation was; *“not winning the battle against climate change” and that it's up to youth to “rescue the planet”*.

We need to appeal to the attitudes and understandings that shape public morality with the aim of strengthening them. We now have the social media network to help us and over 10 million (and growing fast) young people focused on what needs to be done.

We must not let the word “justice” lose its meaning. Its meaning has more to do with “fair play” than with “payback.” The real meaning of justice is not found in revenge but in reparation, reconciliation, and restoration. The meanings of words like justice, love, honesty, truth, good, evil and morality are critically important in our world of contemporary tolerance.

### **Forever United – Never Divided – We are all in this together!**

Much the same way that love is blind, the hatred of raceprejudicebullybigotism is also blind and makes human beings prone to believe things that are simply not true. Too many of us fall victim to this offensive, repulsive and socially unacceptable way of thinking.

Looking past the everyday particulars of daily politics and government policies that fill the news and social media outlets, we instead need to take-in the wider view of how people do treat other, and how they should treat each other better. In the light of many lessons we are learning from the COVID-19 pandemic there is no better time than now to take this opportunity, to name it - raceprejudicebullybigotism - discuss it more - and condemn it.

Raceprejudicebullybigotism is my suggested new word for this decade. The antidotes for it exist in every country - as they have for hundreds of years – in young people. Now, the same way the world has come together to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, the world needs to come together - led by young people - to fight raceprejudicebullybigotism - a virus that could become know world-wide as RPDBB-20.

---

### **The conversation resumes to end the story:**

**Tech #2 comments;** “Thanks for letting me view these slides. They are a real eye opener. I wish people all over the world could view them and read them to their friends and family. I think these slides (this story) should be posted in every workplace. Slide 7 gives me hope.”

## **Tech #1 ends this story by responding as follows;**

“I agree there is very good reason for hope now because we can rely on the world's youth to bring about needed change.

Greta Thunberg said on Jan 29, 2020 - “the aim of the Fridays For Future Global Movement is to promote ecological, climatic and social responsibility as well as mental health.”

I have no doubt they will accomplish that aim and much more.

They will be faster than a streak of lightning, more powerful than the pounding surf, and mightier than a roaring hurricane in demanding the fundamental societal change that is needed. Governments and corporations should concede to their wishes now to ensure a healthy and productive future for themselves and for society at large. .

## **The End**

### **Author's Note:**

In this global crisis our common humanity has revealed itself. This is a teachable moment.

Because society is always evolving, the concrete demands of the common good will also evolve. This means that the task of creating a good life for all members of society, in all parts of the world, is never perfectly realized. Because of the pervasive temptations of individualism and self-interest, one of the most pressing demands of the common good is the persistent conversion of hearts in the realization that we do not exist for ourselves. We are all in this together.

We must prepare for how our world will be transformed by the climate crises that will occur, over the next 15 years and beyond. We may soon face challenges bigger than COVID-19. We need to understand now that even small increases in temperature will lead to large increases in evaporation, large increases in powerful storms and wild fires, and damage to our food supply. We need to understand now that even small changes in our human relations and our ability to get along and cooperate with each other will matter a great deal.

Therefore in the hope of converting hearts, securing world-wide cooperation and defeating RPDBB-20 everywhere, please pass this story along.

About the author:

Robert Hicks is retired and lives in Niagara Falls Ontario. For over 40 years he has been a Community Activist, a World Peace Activist and an Environmental Activist. He is now one of approximately 800 Niagara Health Volunteers providing compassionate assistance to patients and their families to help Niagara Health achieve it's goal of: Extraordinary Caring. Every Person. Every Time. With the help of volunteers Niagara Health is succeeding in that goal. Whatever your skills, please show the will and become a volunteer in your community.