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Critics compare President Trump's initial response to pandemic as "Nero fiddling while Rome burned"

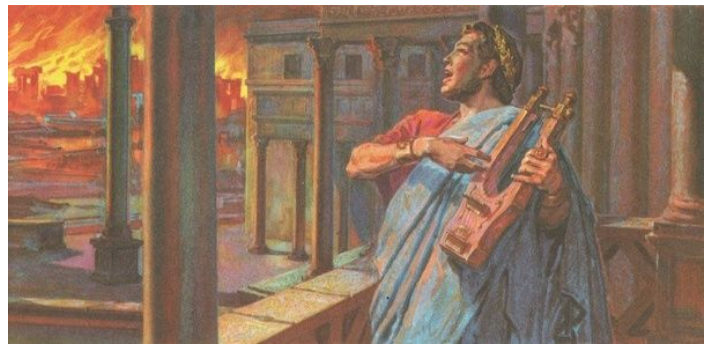
By Steve Horton

Critics of President Trump have characterized his response to the impending arrival and then early spread of the novel coronavirus pandemic in the United States, and to the medical and scientific warnings that accompanied it, as one of indifference, inaction, and disregard.

A number of them have compared it to "Nero fiddling while Rome burned."

My main image of this historical analogy comes from the 1951 movie "Quo Vadis," starring Robert Taylor and Deborah Kerr, but with Peter Ustinov doing a memorable portrayal of Nero—the self-absorbed, callous and slightly mad Roman emperor.

The plot line centers around Taylor's character, a Roman general, returning from a military campaign and finding that a new religion, Christianity has taken hold. He subsequently meets and falls in love with the Christian maiden played by Kerr. He also, upon learning more about her faith, begins to change his outlook.



Nero fiddling while Rome burned.

During the movie, as in real life, a fire consumed a large portion of Rome. The reference to Nero's fiddling was that he didn't care what happened to his subjects, lacked empathy to their plight, and was concerned only about himself. It also implied that he was an ineffectual leader during a time of crisis.

However, there is a second part to the story. In the movie, Nero needed a scapegoat—someone to blame for the fire and turn attention away from his lack of action. The Christians served this purpose.

From what I'm reading, the World Health Organization (WHO) is being cast to play this role; the villain who will be blamed for not properly informing the president and his administration of the threat that the disease posed to the American public and the speed in which it has spread.

Whether President Trump fits this description of "Nero fiddling"—a harsh one when you think about it—most likely depends on your political allegiance. But that's true, it seems, on all manner of issues, including the

threat of COVID-19 and the best way to deal with it.

Judgements tend to be subjective rather than objective.

The political and social divisions that now exist between partisans on either side has become deep and wide. It'll be the moderates (Republicans, Democrats, and Independents)—what I call the 'sensible center'—who will bridge the gap, if any bridging can be done, or who, better yet, will backfill the gap and create a common ground.

We have a virus that doesn't care if you're a Democrat or Republican, or whether you're a conservative, liberal, or moderate. It's oblivious to your income, social standing, or religious belief. It does not take into account your stand on issues.

But such considerations do matter to people—meaning you and I. They inform and influence our opinions and choices

The impending 2020 election had already promised to be contentious. Toss in a pandemic—the specter of so many deaths along with the economic fallout that is occurring—and the upcoming campaign will be a humdinger, with the outcome possibly transformative.

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