

Where is my America?

I saw the news reports, and at first I was shocked. Shocked to see cities in my own country erupting in flames as masked protesters threw bricks and Molotov cocktails at policemen who were trying to keep everybody safe from harm. Then I became profoundly sad as I watched the video of a policeman with his knee on a man's throat who was gasping for breath as life slowly seeped from his body.

Not here, I thought. Not now. Hadn't we all been through enough with three months of 'house arrest' of forced 'social distancing,' suspecting anyone we came in contact with to be a carrier of a deadly disease? Did we really need another senseless death to deal with? Wasn't our collective feeling of despair, of hopelessness, enough of a burden? Then I became angry at the realization that we have apparently learned nothing about each other in the half-century that has passed since the civil rights protests and assassinations of the sixties made us all numb to the bone. The anger built up in me as I saw mobs of young people breaking windows, setting fire to police cars and looting stores, walking off with their booty of stolen goods from shops...some owned by their *own* people.

Seeing the fire at St. John's Church only blocks from the White House and on the streets of D.C., streets I have walked down many times was like being struck by a gut punch that takes the wind right out of you. Where were the police? The fire department? The National Guard? Didn't this city's mayor (and the mayors of other big cities) understand the importance of this situation - of crowd control - of keeping the peace and protecting the innocent? I became disgusted that our country had given in to the criminals among us and that the criminals were now calling the shots as they insisted on being protected because they were victims of a society that had discarded them because they were Black.

My disgust could not be contained as I saw many of them film each other with their cellphones, looking to become feature players in some Internet short film that they would share with other disgruntled social drop-outs on Facebook or Twitter. Then I felt ashamed that my generation had looked the other way while we let our country be handed off to people who knew nothing of sacrifice, honor, respect, responsibility, patriotism or accountability. How could we have let this happen? What were we thinking when we allowed our universities to become petri dishes for bankrupt ideologies that would reverse all the gains we made through two centuries of our existence? Did we think that our sons and daughters (and granddaughters and grandsons) would just "come to their senses" and reject these ideologies and become good little model citizens once they grew up?

How wrong we were. Our permissiveness and wishful thinking did us in. Because we ignored the lessons of history we were doomed to repeat the mistakes of hopeful parents that didn't teach their children the difference between right and wrong, between what works in society and what doesn't. We coddled them instead of challenging their brashness. We refused to push back. So, our children pushed US back and thumbed their noses at authority and our institutions. Because we refused to clearly understand how different our generations were, they essentially banned us from the conversation. Instead, our children retreated to technology's table and created their own parallel universe of 'apps'.

They were no longer willing to look back at our American history. They rejected anything that was older than themselves and that included outdated and outmoded ideals like patriotism. Open borders and no rules were the preferred order of the day. Everybody was a victim at the hands of my generation. That includes all Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, women, homosexuals, the poor, the unemployed, those with college tuition debt, etc., etc. When I thought of the progress we made with our economy over the last three years (up until the country's governors decided to lock down their citizenry and sideline their businesses) I was saddened that these thugs couldn't wait another few months to see if things wouldn't get back to normal before destroying the

infrastructure. Couldn't they have put their balaclavas on the shelf and maybe, just maybe found themselves a job in the new post-Covid-19 economy?

America is under attack. Make no mistake about that. There is enough blame to go around, so we should try to avoid failing into THAT trap, initially. A better solution would be to immediately preserve order and to arrest those who are breaking the law and endangering the rest of us. Then we can begin the next phase of figuring out what to do about fixing the system that put us all at risk from wanton violence and yes, I'm speaking of violence perpetrated by the authorities operating within the system along with the 'ordinary' criminals on our streets.

Is there racism in America? Yes. Is there injustice in America? Yes. Is there bigotry and ignorance and stupidity in America? Absolutely. But there are still enough decent people left to turn things around. To do so we must be willing to admit our failings and our mistakes AND admit that we are still much closer to our goal of providing opportunity and a pathway to prosperity for all our citizens than many would have predicted 60-70 years ago.

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