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Welcome to the third mixtape. Crazy year we're having, isn't it?

This book is, as were the first two, insufficiently edited, considering the only editor I can afford is the free edition of Grammarly. I have read through the book countless times, but my eyes do not always see the words on the page; but rather, they see the words I intended to put on the page, with the spelling I intended to use. So please forgive me for any typos in this book, I hope you still enjoy it. Or rather, I hope it makes you so angry that you have no other choice but to stand and take action.

For action is what we need.

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form whatsoever. Just don't steal my shit unless you're willing to send me lots and lots of money for it—in that case, steal all of my shit.

I could use the money to upgrade my Grammarly account.

The list of names compiled in the Acknowledgments of this book was originally compiled by the website BabyNames.com. I hope they are not mad at me for using their list. Please don't sue me. I'm poor.

Also, I would like to add that this book is not intended to be an attack on America; but rather, it is a cry to America to change before it is too late. We can still save this beautiful nation of ours—but first, before we can save it, we must admit and acknowledge that it is broken.

Also, also, I know these issues are not solely the issues of America—but the American experience is the only one I am somewhat qualified enough to comment on.

Also, also, also, I dedicate this book to the religious folks who have lost their way. May each and every one of you find your way back to God; or may you discover God for the very first time.

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*In the end,  
we will remember  
not the words of our enemies,  
but the silence of our friends.*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

*History has its eyes on you.*

John Legend  
on *The Hamilton Mixtape*

# Amer·i·ca-twen·ty

\ə-ˈmer-ə-kə-ˈtwen-tē\ (*noun*)

: a disease that has been transmitted from generation to generation of Americans since the birth of this nation; only now, in the year 2020 CE, the age-old disease has become so indisputable and destructible that it can no longer be ignored. The disease appears differently in every American, but it is present in all. Symptoms include, but are not limited to: Racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, supremacy, patriarchy, elitism, classism, political divisiveness, fearmongering, conspiracy theories, worshipping of false gods, overconsumption of Fox News and CNN and Facebook and Twitter and Instagram and whatever it is QAnon is screaming about, and the list goes on and on and on. Republicans say Democrats are the sick ones; Democrats say Republicans are the sick ones—but, in reality, both are sick, and all are sick. There is currently no known cure for this disease. But the result, if this disease is not cured, is quite simple: the destruction of our country.

*The Fourth of July, 2020*

Dear America,  
I refuse to put my hand  
over my chest  
and pretend like  
everything is all right.  
We are broken.  
We are fragmented to the bone.  
Our veins are severed  
and there is blood pouring  
through the streets  
of Washington, DC.

So put the fireworks away,  
set the hot dogs down,  
keep your flags at half-mast—  
today is not a day for celebration!  
Rather it is a day for mourning.  
Mourning over a country promised  
but never delivered,  
a country declared  
but never actualized.

I WAS PLANNING on releasing something very different this year. It was a novella called *Nobody's Happy*, and the first paragraph went like this:

"Your parents fucking lied to you. They told you if you worked hard enough, if you acted good enough, if you loved big enough then happiness would always be rewarded to you. But that simply isn't true."

It went on to tell a bunch of depressing stories about a bunch of depressing people living a bunch of depressing lives. It was something I had been working on, on and off, for over two years.

The first printed copy is currently sitting on the shelf next to me as I write this.

And that is where it will remain.

I have also spent the last year and some months working on a novel. It is a satirical sci-fi novel about America, making metaphors of all of America's very real issues.

But right now does not feel like an appropriate time to publish a novella about fictional lives; it doesn't feel apt to

write metaphors about America falling apart when America is falling apart in real life and needs no metaphors.

A global pandemic is currently killing thousands of Americans. The streets are flooded with protests nationwide. The President is threatening the American people through tweets and brutality from his secret police; all because they refuse to bow their knee, refuse to believe what he believes, refuse to listen to his every command.

Refuse to call him their king.

Police officers are storming American streets as if they were in war: and their enemy, it seems, is America itself. Tear gas and rubber bullets and batons are flying through the air at alarming rates. Protestors are being arrested, detained, and forced into unmarked vans as they are taken to undisclosed locations for crimes that have not been committed.

How am I—in a time like this—to publish fictional stories about fictional lives? How am I to write metaphors that will just go over the heads of those who need to hear them most?

In a time when America is on the verge of collapse, on the brink of the Second Civil War, only months away from a possibly devastating and corrupt election, how am I to write or publish anything unrelated to the turmoil we are facing as a nation?

How could I look myself in the mirror knowing that I said nothing on the subject?

How could I write metaphors when we don't have the time to dissect what those metaphors are trying to say?

We need blunt and brutal honesty.

We can no longer cover our wounds with hopes and prayers.

We need change.

We need action.  
We need a revolution.  
And we need it now.

• • •

JUST YESTERDAY—WHILE America was collapsing—  
fireworks were shot into the sky to honor our country.

BOOM!  
BOOM!  
BOOM!

My dogs ran for cover, they barked at the sky, they  
whimpered. They turned to me for guidance. But all I could do  
was shrug my shoulders and shake my head.

I was in disbelief; that in a country so divided, in a  
country on the verge of turmoil, in a country in the midst of  
the most important dialogue we've had in half of a century, in  
a country in the middle of a global pandemic, in a country  
where the President has repeatedly threatened his own  
citizens, that people still found it a good time to celebrate our  
country.

To shoot off fireworks.  
To eat hot dogs.  
To gather together.

It was then, as fireworks exploded in the sky, as flags  
waved on every lawn, as country music was blasted from  
every backyard, as social distancing orders were completely  
ignored, as the President gave yet another divisive speech, that  
I decided to set my other projects aside.

I needed to work on something new.  
I needed to respond to the times we find ourselves in.

And so I began working on the project that is now in your hands.

This is my response to the times.

• • •

IN THIS BOOK you will find a mixture of poetry and streams of consciousness. You will find raw anger, utter sadness, unfiltered disdain, and, quite possibly, you will find what you believe to be an incredibly ignorant boy talking about things he does not understand.

I am not the sharpest tool in the shed, the brightest crayon in the box, the smartest kid in the class, and I do not pretend to be.

I am still young and naive and I have much to learn about this world.

I admit that I am sheltered and privileged.

But I am heartbroken at this time. I am completely sickened and disappointed in my country and in my countrymen. I have lost respect for many friends, family members, and acquaintances over these last few months that drag and blur and refuse to end. And in times of despair, I have always turned to writing.

So here I am—writing again.



*America, America*

America, America:  
The land where a man can be killed  
By a man with a badge,  
Yet the outcry only occurs  
When a Target gets destroyed.

America, America:  
Where the President calls  
White supremacists good people  
And protestors domestic terrorists.

America, America:  
Where bearing guns  
Is Patriotic  
And bearing signs  
Is criminal.

America, America:  
Where riots are manufactured  
To instill fear in the people  
Because no man is easier to control  
Than a man cowering in fear.

America, America:  
Where our racist past  
Is swept under the rug  
And ignored in schools  
And erased from public consciousness.

America, America:  
Where our flag has become  
Synonymous with racism,  
And is waved  
As an anti-protest  
To the idea  
That black lives matter.

America, America:  
Where admitting that our country is flawed  
Is somehow unpatriotic,  
Yet the so-called Patriotic Americans  
Wear hats saying America  
Is no longer great.

America, America:  
The land that yells 'Freedom!'  
While having the largest prison population  
On the planet.

America, America:  
Where the American dream  
Is hidden behind white picket fences  
That only the richest  
Can afford.

America, America:  
Where it's profit over our people  
Economy over our lives  
Politicians over our wishes  
And debt over our dreams.

RYAN DAVID GINSBERG

America, America:  
Where the black man cannot breathe  
Where the indigenous man has no home  
Where the Mexican man must constantly prove his citizenship  
Where the Asian man gets mocked on TV  
Where the woman is seen as too hostile for power  
Where the white man rewrites history until he is the superhero  
of every story.

America, America:  
Where kids are separated from their parents  
And locked inside cages  
And abused by their new caretakers  
And now it's nothing but old news  
And we're on to the next trend.

America, America:  
When will we look at our reflection  
And see the ugly beast  
That we have always been?

America, America:  
The world was laughing at us  
But now they are worried sick  
Of what we have become.

America, America:  
When will we change our ways?

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to have a conversation about the world we find ourselves in without first talking about the 2019 Novel Coronavirus, otherwise known as COVID-19.

COVID-19 first appeared in Wuhan, China, sometime around November 2019, though very little was said about it until December 31, when the World Health Organization sent out the first warning about a rise in cases of pneumonia in Wuhan.

At the time, I was preparing for my New Year's Eve festivities.

"2020," I said, "is going to be my year."

"You hear that world?" I yelled.

"2020 is going to be my year!"

And I meant it.

Me and my girl—we dressed to the nines, ready to bring in the year that was going to change everything for us.

We kissed at midnight and yelled:

“2020 is going to be our year!”

But 2020 had other plans.

• • •

THE FIRST CONFIRMED case arrived in the United States on January 20, 2020.

But still, the alarms were not rung.

January ended and 2020 was looking great. My novel was progressing well. It was certainly going to be the project that put me on the map. My girlfriend and I were getting things in order to finally move in together. I was climbing out of debt. I found a new puppy in the street and named him Shadow.

Everything was good. No, everything was great.

2020 was going to be my year.

Then February came and went, and my year was still looking good. I had nearly paid off all of my credit card debt. I interviewed to become a high school English teacher and was told that my employment for the upcoming school year was all but guaranteed.

I had my adult pants ironed and readied to put them on.

And then:

On March 11, COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic.

On March 13, I was suddenly unemployed.

On March 14, my girlfriend was suddenly unemployed.

On March 19, a stay-at-home order was declared for the entire state of California.

The NBA was shut down. Baseball was shut down. Concerts were canceled. Restaurants were closed. Numerous businesses shut their doors. Office workers were told to work from home. Millions of Americans were immediately, like my girlfriend and me, suddenly made unemployed. All gatherings of less than 10 people were strongly discouraged.

Everybody was to be avoided, for they could be asymptotically carrying this deadly disease that we still knew little about.

There was panic everywhere—shelves at grocery stores were suddenly empty of all rice, meat, canned goods, soap, hand sanitizer, Lysol wipes, diapers, and toilet paper; everyone was afraid to leave their home; mixed messages were thrown out by newscasters, politicians, and social media figureheads trying to beat one another to the truth, resulting in many of them missing completely and the truth getting lost to conspiracies and mass confusion.

I found myself thinking of *I Am Legend*.

I waited for the zombies to appear.

• • •

JUST LIKE THAT—with the snap of a finger—the world had completely changed.

And 2020 was, most certainly, not going to be my year.

I was denied unemployment benefits.

I was unable to secure a teaching job.

My debt, which was almost to zero, began to climb once more into the thousands as I attempted to survive off of a single stimulus check of \$1,200.

And as for my adult pants:

They were thrown into the bottom drawer of my dresser to gather dust and to form new wrinkles.

“Maybe next year,” I say to them on occasion.

“Yes, maybe next year.”

Then I close the drawer.

IN AMERICA, ANYTHING can become political, and everything can be debated.

Even facts.

Yes!

Especially facts.

In America, facts are all we debate about.

And the beautiful thing about America is that it doesn't matter how unqualified you are, or how qualified your opponent is, to participate in any given debate—in America, all voices are seen as equal, even the voices of the uninformed.

Yes!

Especially the voices of the uninformed.

Those are the greatest of all voices, here, in America.

Oh, yes, America loves the uninformed.

An owner of their very own Facebook page is allowed to debate with scientists who have dedicated their entire lives to the debated topic—and Americans are free to agree with either side, they are free to disregard the legitimacy of any argument and, instead, to lean on all of the feelings and uneducated

opinions that they desire. As long as those uneducated opinions are aligned with their uninformed worldview.

Yes, yes!

In America, it doesn't matter how much evidence a scientist has, if you don't want to agree with the truths he or she presents then you simply don't have to.

That is just the American way.

It doesn't matter a lick that the truths these scientists keep going on and on and on about are not their opinions but are instead scientific discoveries found after extensive research and blah blah blah; it doesn't matter that these scientists belong to countless political parties from all around the world, and it certainly doesn't matter that these scientists have dedicated their lives to research that neither you nor I could ever even begin to comprehend

In America, the only thing that matters is your feelings.

If you don't feel like agreeing with scientific truths, then, well, in America, it is your right to disagree.

Especially if you are a politician.

Oh, yes, politicians are the most exempt from believing in science.

That's probably the first thing they learn in Politician School.

"Repeat after me," says the teacher, "science is bad."

"Repeat after me," says the politician, "science is bad."

Then they are handed a degree and a job at the White House.

A politician can, in America, believe in whatever they want to believe in, especially if what they want to believe in will garner them more votes and, therefore, more power. If that's the case, they can argue against facts all that they want.



Yes!

To a politician, all truths—scientific or not—are debatable. And they tell their supporters the same. In fact, they encourage their supports to ignore all scientists and all reporters and to, instead, look only to them for all of their guidance.

It is better that way.

Safer.

Easier.

Instead of looking to a bunch of people as their source of information, all their supporters need to do is look to them, and believe everything they are told, and to share that message with everyone they know.

Politicians repeatedly tell this to their supporters:

“It is a hoax,” they say.

“It is propaganda,” they say.

“It is not true,” they say.

“It is communism,” they say.

“It is fascism,” they say.

“It is the left trying to control you,” they say.

And their supporters believe them; because, to them, it is far easier to believe that nothing is happening than to accept the truth that everything around them is rapidly falling apart.

Change is hard.

Ignorance is easy.

So they just close their eyes and echo the mantras given to them by their lovely politicians:

“It is a hoax,” they say.

“It is propaganda,” they say.

“It is not true,” they say.

“It is communism,” they say.

“It is fascism,” they say.

“It is the left trying to control us,” they say.

• • •

THIS, THE IDEA that politicians know best, it is not accidental.

It is, admittedly, an ingenious political tactic that a certain political party has absolutely mastered over the years.

It has become their greatest strength.

The tactic is this:

*Sow doubt among all who are not one of us.*

Over the years, this party has gotten better and better at this tactic. They have managed to turn everything their opponent says or does into a hoax to destroy the very fabric of America. They have framed themselves as the only heroes in a country filled with saboteurs, terrorists, communists, fascists, socialists, non-Christians, and so on. They have convinced their base, their supporters, their followers, their believers that their freedoms are constantly under attack, that everything a scientist says is part of a political agenda, and that their Christian values are being targeted by the unreligious left—and that only they, the party, can save them now.

• • •

ROGER AILES STARTED Fox News to help strengthen this tactic within the party, and Fox News has since become the largest and most viewed news station in the country...though they would never admit it. Instead, their message is that the ‘Mainstream Media’—which, by sheer numbers, they are the

leaders of—is trying to quiet them and destroy them. They swear that their messages are being suffocated and suppressed, while simultaneously their messages are being featured on more television screens across the country than any other station in America.

“The Mainstream Media—which we most certainly are not the leaders of—is trying to destroy the very fabric of America. They are trying to steal your freedom! And your guns! Especially your guns! Oh, yes, they want all of your guns! If you want to keep your guns out of the hands of the thieving left, then you must vote for us. For all of us.”

And their viewers believe their every lie.

Why?

Because their party has primed them to.

Because they have been taught to doubt everyone who is not one of them.

And Fox News is one of them.

And whatever they say is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help them God.

Seriously, God...are you going to help them or not?

• • •

SO WHEN THE Centers for Disease Control and Prevention came out and told Americans that they needed to stay home, needed to shut down schools and businesses, needed to wear masks to slow the spread of COVID-19, the party did what the party did best:

They politicized science.

They debated facts.

They created their own reality.

They sowed doubt.

They went on their totally-not-Mainstream Media news channel and said:

“It is a hoax.”

“It is propaganda.”

“It is not true.”

“It is communism.”

“It is fascism.”

“It is the left trying to control you.”

The party waged war, once more, against scientific truth. They ignored the overwhelming evidence all around them. And the supporters of the party turned to Facebook posts and uninformed politicians, instead of to the scientists who had dedicated their entire lives to the study of infectious diseases, like COVID-19. They ignored the stay-at-home orders; they ignored the suggestions of social distancing; they ignored the cries to wear masks; they ignored the numbers of cases, the number of deaths, the destruction of America; they called it all a hoax, propaganda, not true, communism, fascism, the left trying to control them.

They yelled, “This is all a hoax to destroy the very fabric of America!”

And, as a result, the members of the party not only didn't help America to flatten the curve, or to slow the spread; but instead, they helped the curve to spike, while nearly every other wealthy country in the world got their spread under control. And when the number of deaths in America was shown to them, to the party, when the destruction of their actions was presented to them, when the President of the United States, the leader of the party, was asked to explain the actions of his party, the President and the party and all of their

believers got together and they all said, together, in unison, in one voice, among themselves, on Fox News and on their Facebook feeds:

“It is a hoax.”

“It is propaganda.”

“It is not true.”

“It is communism.”

“It is fascism.”

“It is the left trying to control us.”

And everyone in America was left to believe whatever they felt like believing.

Because that is just how it works in America.

Yes, yes.

*Politicians*

Politicians have no sturdy stances,  
Only steady goals  
To attain power at whatever the cost.  
They will switch jerseys as  
Soon as they see an opportunity.  
They will change their policies,  
But only to get inside the room  
Where power is unchecked,  
Where they laugh at their constituents  
Who continue to vote them in,  
Where they stuff their pockets  
And sign bills without ever  
Bothering to think  
What those bills will do  
To their constituents.  
Because they don't care about what they do  
To their constituents,  
Who to them are just faceless creatures  
Who only need to be considered  
During an election year.

They don't care about us—  
They only care about power.

*24-Hour News*

Politics has infiltrated our every conversation  
Has taken over our minds  
Has broken our spirits  
Has tired our bodies  
We are constantly in disbelief  
And in outrage  
About what those  
Who are opposite of us are doing  
We are constantly bombarded by fearmongers  
On all fronts  
Because it leads to more views  
Which leads to more advertisers  
Which leads to more money

Our peace has been stolen  
Our sanity has been misplaced  
Our confidence has been forgone  
Our country has been sold

We are nothing more than dollar signs  
To 24-hour news cycles  
Wanting to scare us  
Until we cannot turn the tv off  
Until we cannot look away  
Until the advertisements have been played  
Until their pockets have been stuffed  
Until our spirits have faded away  
Until we are too tired

And too weak  
And too sick  
And too scared  
To turn away from the screen  
So we keep watching  
And they keep feeding us  
Fear.



THE ECONOMY IS all America cares about.

It is all America has ever cared about.

The Dow Jones this, and the Dow Jones that.

"But what about the economy?" we say here in America.

"Yes, that would be wonderful, but what about the economy?"

"Okay, sure, I would love that, too, but who would pay for it? Hmm? Not the rich. I may one day be rich and I sure wouldn't want to pay for it with all of my hard-earned money. So who then would it be? Hmm? And what would that do to the economy? Oh, poor Mr. Dow Jones. I don't think he would like that very much at all."

Hundreds of thousands of Americans have gotten sick.

Tens of thousands of Americans have died.

Millions of Americans have been made unemployed.

Americans have lost security, have lost health care, have lost homes, have lost lives, have lost everything—and what is it that we are concerned about here in America?

Mr. Dow Jones, and all of his billionaire friends.

•••

AND HERE IS why:

The rich folks who make all of the profit—and make up the *entirety* of what we call the American economy—will all be home, comfortable and safe in their luxurious mansions, while their underpaid workers return to their offices, to their restaurants, to their department stores, and so on. It is only their employees who will be getting sick from COVID-19, not Mr. Dow Jones's friends. It is only their employees' families who will be getting sick, secondhand; not Mr. Dow Jones's family. It is only the poor folks of America, the expendable holder-uppers of America, the working class of America, the whats-his-names and the whats-her-faces and the he-wants-more-money-so-fire-him-and-replace-him-with-a-young-kid-who-doesn't-know-he's-worth-more-moneys of America who will be getting sick as they once more uphold the American economy; not Mr. Dow Jones.

Mr. Dow Jones doesn't, nor do any of his friends, give a fuck if an employee dies, if a family member dies, if a customer dies, if an American dies, if a poor folk dies, if a holder-upper dies, if a...

Because guess what?

Mr. Dow Jones will keep going up, up, up, until you can't even see all the dead bodies piling up below it.

After all, what is America without a little death for the economy?

What is more Patriotic than a poor man dying for the rich?

I, myself, can think of nothing.

Sacrifices must be made for Mr. Dow Jones.

That is just the price of freedom, baby.

That is just the American way.

Yes, yes!

That's just what it means to live in a capitalistic country:

People must do whatever it takes to save the economy, to save the billion-dollar corporations, to keep making millionaires into billionaires and billionaires into trillionaires; Jeff Bezos needs to make some more money, baby; so we must all get the fuck back to work—even if it means a couple of us must die.

Say bye-bye to your mother.

Bye-bye to your father.

Bye-bye to your grandmother.

Bye-bye to them all.

Because Jeff Bezos needs to make some more money, baby.

Yes, yes!

•••

SO GO ON, little poor man.

Get your ass back to work.

Go make that millionaire boss of yours into a billionaire, and then make that billionaire boss into a trillionaire.

That will make Mr. Dow Jones a very, very happy man.

So go on, get.

But before you go, make sure to say bye-bye to your children.

Because you may not make it home.

Let them know Daddy has a Dow Jones to save.

*Mr. Dow Jones*

There are two economies in America:  
One belongs to Mr. Dow Jones  
And all of his friends;  
The second belongs to us,  
The other ninety-nine percent.  
One is for the rich,  
And the other is for the poor;  
But our economy  
Is never talked about by Mr. Dow Jones,  
Nor by any of his friends...  
For they do not care about our economy.

We are nothing more than pencil pushers to them,  
Dotters of their i's and crossers of their t's.  
We are busy doing their busy work,  
And they are busy living in an America  
That we are not permitted in.  
In an America that they claim is the only America,  
That they claim any American can make their way into  
Just as long as we work as hard as they did.  
An America that I have never had the chance to see.  
An America built on the back  
Of the work we did in their cubicles,  
And with the interest we paid on their loans,  
And with the insufficient fund fees we were forced to pay  
Because the low wages we were given did not suffice,  
And with the tax loopholes provided to them  
By their politicians in high places,

And with the profit that was supposed  
To trickle down to us  
But somehow got stuck  
In a second America;  
Hidden somewhere in the hills,  
Behind gates  
And bodyguards  
And fees  
That we could never afford.

There are two Americas in America:  
One belongs to Mr. Dow Jones  
And all of his friends;  
The second belongs to us,  
The other ninety-nine percent.

*Privatize*

In America, we privatize everything—  
We privatize banks,  
We privatize schools,  
We privatize health care,  
We privatize prisons,  
We privatize anything and everything we can;  
Because, well, “That’s just how capitalism works.”

If you can’t afford our bank fees,  
then keep your money at home,  
Under a mattress,  
Or wherever it is that  
Poor folks  
Like yourself  
Keep your money.  
But don’t forget:  
You need a checking account  
To pay your bills,  
And a credit score  
To rent our homes,  
And a loan  
From us  
With high-interest rates  
If you want to buy our land.

If you can’t afford our fancy private schools  
Then go to the public school  
Assigned to you,

Which may be underfunded  
And possibly understaffed  
Because the best teachers  
Are getting paid more  
At private schools  
That only rich kids can afford to attend,  
The schools where rich kids learn  
How to stay rich  
While poor kids  
Stay poor  
In their silly old  
Public schools.

If you can't afford our private health care,  
Well, you better stay healthy then,  
Or else it'll cost you an arm  
And a leg  
To fix that aching heart.

And then there are private prisons:  
Where slave labor is still happening,  
Legally,  
All thanks to the wonderful 13<sup>th</sup> amendment.  
These private prisons,  
And their incredibly cheap labor,  
Help us to produce things  
For really, really cheap  
Here  
In the United States of America,  
Which is wonderful for our  
Beautiful, beautiful economy.

Oh, yes,  
Mr. Dow Jones is very proud  
Of his private prisons.  
And to keep these private prisons running—  
Efficiently, effectively, and incredibly cheaply—  
All we have to do is arrest as many people as we can,  
And then keep them in prison for as long as we can,  
And then, when they get out,  
We have arranged multiple ways  
To quickly put them back in  
To save on the cost  
Of training new slave laborers.

This—the privatization of otherwise  
Perfectly fine public services—  
Is wonderful for the American economy.  
It makes really rich people even richer,  
And it makes the Dow Jones soar  
Higher and higher.  
Sure, some poor folks get harmed  
In the process;  
But this is America  
And what are the poor for  
but to sacrifice their lives  
To Mr. Dow Jones,  
Our lord and savior?

Don't forget the American mantra, after all:  
That you, too,  
Maybe, one day,  
Will be really, really rich;



So do whatever you can  
Now  
To protect the rich,  
And to sacrifice the poor,  
Which you,  
Maybe, one day,  
Will no longer be.

That is just the American way.  
Yes, yes.

COVID-19 IS NOT the only disease ravaging the United States of America at this moment. It is not the only pandemic plaguing our people. It is not the only illness spreading like wildfire through our country.

There is another. It is not a new disease, but rather it is a disease that has been plaguing this country since its conception in 1776. It is a disease that our forefathers suffered from, a disease they handed down to every father and mother and daughter and son that they birthed.

Our country was built with sickly hands. Our laws were written by men with this disease flowing through their veins, corrupting their minds of which the laws were thought up. Over the years, millions of Americans have lost their lives to this disease. And millions of souls have perished because of it, been banished to hell, have been forced into the eternal fire for the sins caused by this disease.

So, no; this disease is not new.

But now, in the year 2020, it has once more erupted to the forefront of conversation, it has been debated thoroughly on

every website and in every bubble, every American has solidified their opinion based purely on their feelings, and many have ignored the facts of the case—because their party told them that those facts were just hoaxes created by the left to ruin America. But the disease is very real, and its effects can be seen all around us.

There are numerous symptoms to this disease, of which I have dubbed AMERICA-20:

Racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, supremacy, patriarchy, elitism, classism, political divisiveness, fearmongering, conspiracy theories, worshipping of false gods, overconsumption of Fox News and CNN and Facebook and Twitter and Instagram and whatever it is QAnon is screaming about, and the list goes on and on and on, and is ever-growing as the disease continues to evolve and attempts to cover itself up with new slogans and new laws and new arguments and new flags and new clothes.

But the important thing to know about this disease is this:

It is everywhere. It is all around us. It is flowing through the veins of every American, whether they know it or not. Every American has different symptoms; some Americans have more symptoms, some Americans have less; some Americans are so good at hiding their symptoms that you believe they are not sick, but I promise you they are.

We all are.

This disease has become synonymous with being American. And it is a disease that every American must be fighting against every day.

Because while our symptoms all differ, we are all sick; and we must join together in the fight to eradicate AMERICA-20 from our country, before it eradicates our country.

*Make America Great Again*

When you say 'make America great again'  
Which America are you talking about?  
The America that genocides  
Or the America that enslaves?  
The America that lynches  
Or the America that segregates?  
The America with internment camps  
Or the America with detention centers  
Or the America with overflowing prisons  
Or the America that commits war crimes  
Or the America that sends crack into neighborhoods  
Then arrests those who they have made into addicts?

When you say 'make America great again'  
Which America do you mean?  
Because, to me, it seems  
America has never been great before.

*History Is Watching*

History is watching  
Every move that we make:  
As a nation,  
As a society,  
As a movement,  
As individuals.  
One day a historian will sit down  
And write about our time.  
What will they say?  
Which side will we be on?  
How will that historian tell our story?  
Who will be the good,  
The bad,  
The one who claimed neutrality  
And, as a result,  
Is painted with the blood  
They were too neutral  
To prevent?  
We are constantly assigning labels  
In all directions,  
To all people.  
Calling them:  
Socialists,  
Communists,  
Nazis,  
Tyrants,  
Racists,  
And so on.

But one day a historian will sit down  
And assign the final label.  
Which label will be assigned to you?  
Which label will be assigned to me?  
Which label will be assigned to us?  
Who will that historian be?  
What will they say?  
Which side will we be on?  
How will that historian tell our story?  
How will we be remembered?

IN AMERICA WE have been raised to fear immigrants. We have been told that they are coming here to America to take our jobs, to take our homes, to take over our communities, to eradicate our culture, to consume our food, and, according to our current President, to rape our people.

And although based on the definition of the word 'immigrant', any person who comes to live permanently in America who was not born in America is an immigrant, the people who are most often attached to this fear of immigrants—the immigrants who are supposedly ravaging our country and raping our people—only ever seem to be the immigrants with brown skin.

That is who is meant to come to mind when America says the word immigrant.

That is who the President paints pictures of with his rhetoric.

That is who is shown to us in videos, in news articles, in movies, and all over our Facebook feeds:

Brown people coming to take our things.

• • •

AMERICA IS FAR from the first country to use fear tactics like this against a minority group as a way of uniting their people. And this is far from the first group of people that America has attempted to do this with. We did it with Native Americans, we did it with the Irish, we did it with Italians, we did it with the Chinese, we did it with the Japanese. History books, when written accurately, are filled with moments of Americans joining together to fear and hate Others—especially when those Others are groups of minorities.

Because it is far easier to blame Others for the faults of our country than it is to blame ourselves.

The Statue of Liberty, which is one of our country's most prolific and honored statues, declares us, the United States of America, a haven for all refugees and immigrants and asylum seekers.

Good one, France.

But the joke went right over our silly little heads.

• • •

WHILE JEWS AND Poles and Roma and Soviet POWs were being rounded up and placed into concentration camps by Nazi soldiers, as a way of protecting Germany's culture from Others, Americans were rounding up every Japanese immigrant and Japanese American they could find and taking them to internment camps in Tule Lake, California; Minidoka, Idaho; Manzanar, California; Topaz, Utah; Jerome, Arkansas; Heart Mountain, Wyoming; Poston, Arizona; Granada, Colorado; and Rohwer, Arkansas.



The government did this, they said, to protect Americans.  
To protect us from Others.

And they are doing it again. Only this time they are calling them detention centers, and the victims of our crimes against humanity—and the brute of all our hate and blame—are brown human beings coming into our country to, as the fearmongers say, take our jobs, take our homes, take over our communities, eradicate our culture, consume our food, and rape our people.

We—under the guise of defending American culture—are locking human beings in cages and tearing families apart. We are locking parents up without their children for months at a time, sometimes years, as they wait to see a judge to talk about their hopes of asylum. The asylum that the Statue of Liberty claims we would gladly offer to them. Meanwhile, as we force their parents to wait to see a judge that will most certainly just tell them to get on back to where they came from, we lock their children away in detention centers, where they are abused and mistreated by employees of private businesses who only see these forcefully-orphaned children as dollar signs from taxpayers—which is wonderful for Mr. Dow Jones.

Oh, yes, Mr. Dow Jones just loves the privatization of American torture.

But what Mr. Dow Jones and these private businesses are incapable of considering is this:

These children are human. These parents are human. These immigrants are human beings. They, like us, bleed red. They, like us, love and hope and dream. They, like us, want nothing more than an opportunity to have a good life for themselves and their family.

They, like us, just want to live.

And what do we in America do to them for wanting these things?

We lock them up. We lock them out. We chant:

"Build the wall! Build the wall! Build the wall!"

We treat them as lesser.

We treat them as Other.

We treat them as if we are somehow better than them simply because we were born on the land that some man declared to be within the United States of America borders, and they were born on land that a man declared not to be within the United States of America borders.

"It says so right here," we say, gesturing at the map on our phone.

"Here is America," we say.

"And here is your shithole country," we say.

"So why don't you just go on back to where you came from, you hear?"

"We Americans don't want you here, you hear?"

And all the while the Statue of Liberty keeps that torch of freedom high in the sky.

And the French are laughing their ass off.

And Americans are too busy hating Others to see that we are the butt of the joke.

*What Is A Country?*

What is a country but borders drawn by hand and laws thought  
up by man?  
Who is to say which human being is legal and which is illegal  
In a stolen land?  
Who is to say which human is entering the right way  
When the American way was to enter by slaughtering the  
original owners of the land?  
What makes you deserving of being American  
And Others undeserving?  
You did nothing to earn your Americanness.  
Being born on American land was not some sort of feat,  
It wasn't an accomplishment:  
It was happenstance—  
The happenstance being the location of your mother's uterus  
on the day you arrived on planet earth.  
You are not more deserving of the American lifestyle  
Because of that happenstance,  
And you are no better than anyone else  
Because of the location of their mother's uterus.  
All of us are human,  
We all have the same human DNA.  
Our minds do not differ,  
Nor our hearts,  
Nor our souls.  
If there is a god,  
Then we are all its children  
And every piece of land is our home.

And if there is any god that shows preferential treatment  
toward its children based on the land that that god placed  
their mother's uterus on the day of their arrival,

Then *fuck* that god.

And if that somehow offends you and your idea of god then  
you need to think hard about what and who it is you think  
your god is.

What makes you believe that a god would, for some reason,  
have more affinity for a country invented by man 244  
years ago upon some land that that god created over 4.5  
billion years ago than it does for any other piece of land?

I would bet every American dollar I have that your god does  
not give a shit about America,

Nor any country,

For what is a country to a god?

What is a country to you?

What is a country but borders drawn by hand and laws thought  
up by man?

What is a country?

I AM FULLY aware that, with my writing and publishing of this book, I could be jeopardizing future career opportunities, friendships, relationships, and the opinions my peers hold of me. I am fully aware that, by writing this book, I am opening myself up to criticism and likely revealing the flaws of my young, naive, overly confident, extremely passionate, and at this moment so fucking furious that I can hardly stand it mind. I am fully aware that there is someone better out there to write this book, to talk about these subjects, to educate those who so desperately need educating. I am fully aware that I am a flawed man talking about things I have no right to talk about.

But I must write this book. I have to. I am a writer, and it is my duty—as a writer—to write about society as I see it.

However, I fear that in writing this book I am positioning myself to be some sort of white savior, some misogynistic hero, some heterosexual elitist. But I do not use my voice, nor my privilege, because I believe that those without my privileges are incapable of standing up for themselves, nor that they are too weak to do so. I use my voice, instead, because

here, in America, we have a disease. And, because of that disease, my voice—being inside of a white, straight male—has somehow become louder than the voices we most desperately need to be listening to.

And, because of that, I must use my voice. To speak for those whose voices are ignored. To act for those whose actions are unseen. To stand for those who are denied a platform.

•••

AT NINETEEN YEARS old I visited the country of Botswana. While there, I talked with many Batswana who told me of their dreams of one day coming to America. In their eyes, America was the land of endless opportunity, of ultimate freedom; it was a place where all dreams come true.

To them, America was a paradise.

And I hadn't the heart to tell them that their visions were not entirely true and, instead, in many regards, were only part of an incredibly popular myth.

A story so many in the world desperately want to believe.

I have often said that America is the greatest marketing firm in the world, with their only job being to alter the world's perception of America so that nobody notices the product they are pushing is nothing more than mythology.

Folklore.

A bunch of fucking lies.

And the marketing campaign, until lately, worked wonderfully. Especially among my Batswana friends.

Even after returning to America, their dreams stuck with me. I couldn't rid my mind of them. And I couldn't help but feel guilty: all that I had done to become American, all that I

had done to have this 'endless opportunity' and 'ultimate freedom' and all of my 'dreams come true' was being born on the right piece of land. That's it. My mother's uterus happened to be in an American hospital when my little human body decided it was time to be born. That's all that it took for me to become an American. As for my Batswana friends, the only thing they did to lose out on 'endless opportunity' and 'ultimate freedom' and having all their 'dreams come true' was not waiting for their mother's uterus to be in a similar hospital as the one my mother's uterus was in when they decided it was time to be born.

That was, as far as I could tell, their only mistake; the only thing that gave me what they had always wanted but couldn't get:

The privilege of being called American.

At twenty-one years old, I tattooed the word '*tshela*' on my right forearm. It is a Tswana word, meaning to 'live'. I chose this word for many reasons. For one, I have battled for quite some time with suicidal thoughts; so the word live, simply, was a reminder to myself to keep on living. But the reason I chose to tattoo the word 'live' in Tswana, the language spoken in Botswana, was because I didn't want to live just to live; but rather I wanted to live with the reminder of the advantages I had, the privileges I had, the opportunities that I was given based solely on the location of my mother's uterus on the day I decided I had had enough of being inside the womb and was ready to be born.

I tattooed '*tshela*' as a reminder to myself to always use my privileges and my advantages for the benefit of those who do not have the same privileges and advantages that I have.

*Bootstraps*

In America we say,  
Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.  
In America we say,  
You are not down on your luck,  
You are only down because you are too lazy  
To stand.  
In America we say,  
If you want to be rich,  
Like me,  
Then all you need to do is  
Work hard,  
Like I did.  
In America we say,  
The only thing standing in your way  
Is yourself.  
In America we say,  
Anyone can be successful,  
Even that poor girl over there  
Without the money to go to school,  
And even that guy over there  
Who no one will hire  
Because he was arrested at nineteen  
For having a joint in his pocket,  
Even that kid over there  
Whose parents are both in jail  
So now she has no one at home  
To help her with her homework,  
And even that guy over there



Who went to the boot store today  
And was told  
'We don't sell boots to your kind.'

Because here in America,  
Everything you earn is because of your own doing,  
And everything that you fail to earn  
Is simply because you didn't want it enough.  
So just pull yourself up by the bootstraps, okay?  
And if the boot store doesn't sell boots  
To your kind,  
Then,  
Well,  
You should have worked harder  
To be a different kind.  
Yes, yes.

ON MAY 25, 2020, George Floyd was accused of using a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill to buy some cigarettes. So two officers came and handcuffed George Floyd and placed him in the back of the police car; after which, another police vehicle arrived on the scene, bringing two more officers with it. These officers went to the car, found Floyd in the back seat, and one of the officers proceeded to kick George Floyd until he was knocked out of the car. While George Floyd remained handcuffed, lying flat on his belly, an officer placed his knee on the back of Floyd's neck. Another officer knelt on his back. Another on his legs. While the fourth officer stood watch.

The police officer with his knee to Floyd's neck said, "Get up and get in the car," while continuing to put pressure on his neck. He told him to get back in the car, the car he was already inside of, the car he was kicked out of—all while keeping his knee on George Floyd's neck.

George Floyd screamed out, "I can't! I can't move!"

So the officer, hearing the cries of George Floyd, repositioned his knee and applied more pressure to his neck. Pressing him further into the ground. And said it again:

"Get up and get in the car."

• • •

THAT IS AMERICA.

That dialogue.

That interaction.

That moment:

With a white man's knee on a black man's neck, telling him to get up.

For seven minutes and forty-six seconds.

• • •

YOU SEE, IN America we often say to the black man, "Fix your own problems!" while pressing our knees to their necks, keeping them down, rendering them immovable.

And when they respond, "I can't! I can't move!" what then do we, as white America, do?

We reposition our knee and apply more pressure.

Then we say it again:

"Get up."

• • •

GEORGE FLOYD SCREAMED out, "Please, I can't breathe!"

He screamed out, "My stomach hurts!"

He screamed out, "My neck hurts!"

He screamed out, "Everything hurts!"

He screamed out, "They're going to kill me!"

He screamed out, "Mama!"

Then he screamed no more.

He simply lied there, motionless.

Unconscious.

Dying.

And what did the officer do?

He repositioned his knee and applied more pressure.  
He pushed harder on George Floyd's neck.

• • •

LATER THAT NIGHT, George Floyd was pronounced dead.

That is the America we live in.

Where an officer can kill a black man over an allegedly counterfeit twenty-dollar bill.

Where a black man must stand while simultaneously being forced down.

Where the only way to survive is to pull yourself up by your bootstrap; except, some aren't allowed inside of the boot store.

So they built their own boot stores in Tulsa.

And then we burnt them down.

And while they burned to the ground, we said to them, with the matches still our hands:

“Get up.”

*A Moral Man*

A man's morality should not be judged  
By his ability to follow the law,  
For laws are not always moral.  
For instance:  
Owning slaves was once legal,  
While participating in the Underground Railroad was illegal;  
Refusing to sell a Levittown home to a black man was once  
legal,  
While Claudette Colvin sitting in the white section of the bus  
was illegal;  
Turning Jews over to the Nazi regime was once legal,  
While hiding a Jew, like Anne Frank, in your annex was  
illegal;  
And so on  
And so forth,  
The examples of separation from law  
And morality  
Go on, endlessly.  
Therefore:  
A man's morality should not be judged  
By his ability to follow the often corrupt laws of his land;  
Instead, his morality should be judged  
By the fervor in which he fights against those corrupt laws,  
In which he protests their injustice,  
In which he puts his body on the line  
For the right to be called  
A moral man.

THAT INCIDENT—THE murdering of George Floyd—sparked an outrage so large, in a country that has been outraged for far too long, that millions of us Americans willingly and vigorously and repeatedly marched the streets amid a global pandemic. With masks over our noses and lips, we screamed out the final words of George Floyd. The final words, too, of Eric Garner, who was killed by the police for the crime of selling individual cigarettes. The words were this:

*I can't breathe.*

We held signs high in the sky, forcing the American people to see and acknowledge and accept and hold dear that black lives matter just as much as every other life in this country.

We demanded that the police officers who killed George Floyd—the ones who put their knees to his body, and the one who stood by to protect the officers in the act of murder, and all the officers across this country who remained and remain silent at the sight of injustice—be held accountable for their actions.

•••

“SAY HIS NAME!”

“George Floyd!”

“Say his name!”

“George Floyd!”

“Say his name!”

“George Floyd!”

But while it is George Floyd's name that we are saying, it is not only he who we are protesting for.

We are protesting also for Breonna Taylor, for Elijah McClain, for Ahmaud Arbery, for Sandra Bland, for Eric Garner, for Trayvon Martin, for Tamir Rice, for Kendrick Johnson, for Botham Jean, and for every other black American who was unjustifiably killed because of the color of their skin.

A friend of mine recently told me that George Floyd should not have become the 'hero' of the Black Lives Matter movement because he was a convicted felon with, what he called, a 'long rap sheet'.

To which I said, "We didn't choose him. The cops did, when they decided that his life was less valuable than a twenty-dollar bill."

And the 350 years of mistreatment in America, the reparations promised but never delivered, the racism that still flows freely from the mouth of America had reached a tipping point and it was just George Floyd's murdered body added on top of this pile that finally knocked it over and sent millions of Americans to the streets.

To march.

To say his name.

But it is not only he who we are fighting for.

It is the symbol of what his death represents:  
Seven minutes and forty-six seconds of unflinching  
disregard for human life.

That is what we are protesting about.

• • •

AS THESE PROTESTS raged across the nation, and across the  
world, many Americans stood and joined the fray.

However, some stayed silent. Some refused to speak. And  
some chose, instead, to message me on Instagram, to text me,  
to call me and say:

“You are getting way too political.”

• • •

BUT HERE’S THE thing:

Being angry over the death of a human being for using an  
allegedly counterfeit twenty-dollar bill is not political. The  
statement ‘Black Lives Matter’ is not political. The idea that  
all humans—despite the color of their skin—should not be  
murdered by the police is not political.

The marches are not political.

The outrage is not political.

*This* is not political.

It is human rights that we are after.

The same equality that Martin Luther King, Jr. once  
dreamt about is still being dreamt about by black Americans  
today. We protest because we want acknowledgment by every  
American, and every police officer, that every life is equal and  
should be treated as such. We want every so-called Patriot to



admit that our country has deep, deep, *deep* flaws. We want a correction to the systems that were deliberately built to allow and encourage and protect these injustices.

We want the eradication of AMERICA-20.

And if you are against our movement, it is not because of a political disagreement, it is because of a fundamental difference in the way we view a human life.

• • •

PEOPLE SAY THAT George Floyd wouldn't have been killed if he hadn't have spent that allegedly counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. If he hadn't of 'resisted arrest'. If he simply would have gotten up and gotten back in the car.

This is the argument America has continuously given in response to yet another killing of a black man by our police. They have somehow convinced themselves that it is okay for an officer to kill a man or a woman—a man or a woman, I might add, who they have been sworn to protect—if that person resists their authority.

For years, I have struggled to articulate the foolishness of this belief. I have found myself baffled at the still millions of Americans who believe this argument to be valid. But finally, after reading *Between The World And Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, I have found the perfect response.

I will let him tell it, or rather ask it:

*"Should assaulting an officer of the state be a capital offense, rendered without trial, with the officer as judge and executioner? Is that what we wish civilization to be?"*

• • •

I ASK YOU the same question Ta-Nehisi Coates asked his readers:

*Is that what we wish civilization to be?*

Where police get to decide who lives and who dies? If so, why even bother with courts? What good is a judge and a jury and overpaid lawyers when a police officer could do the job, then and there, with a knee to the neck, or with eight shots to Breonna Taylor, or with an arm around the neck of Elijah McClain—who, like George Floyd, like Eric Garner, like countless others before him and since him, died telling the officers, ‘I can’t breathe’? Why not save the taxpayers billions of dollars and the court hours upon hours of their time?

Let’s just give the officers a gavel to go with their gun and a robe to go with their badge. Let them decide who lives and who dies. No longer do we need evidence, no longer must we assume one’s innocence; we have cops, and that’s all we ever needed.

Again:

*Is that what we wish civilization to be?*

• • •

THIS ISN’T POLITICAL.

Demanding change to a system that has taken countless lives, often over misunderstandings or overreactions or racial biases or a lack of accountability or a lack of training or a lack of concern about the human lives that they were hired to protect, *is not political*.

Furthermore, if you believe that your stance in this debate—whether or not a police officer has the right to kill a human being simply because they may or may not have

committed a crime, and may or may not have resisted arrest— if you believe that your opinion is dependent on the stance of the political party you vote for in November, then what does that say about your political party?

If your political party is against the statement ‘Black Lives Matter’, then what does that say about them?

If your political party is against protests demanding justice over the killing of countless human beings, then what does that say about them?

And what does it say about you, for supporting them, for voting for them, for letting them dictate your stances and your opinions and the way you view a human life?

•••

THIS IS NOT political.

*The Wrong Way*

To those who say:

“I would be more inclined to listen,  
But they are just protesting the wrong way”

I ask you this:

Does police brutality disappear simply because someone  
“protested the wrong way”?

What about racism—does racism disappear simply because  
someone “protested the wrong way”?

How about oppression—does systemic and/or systematic  
oppression disappear simply because someone “protested  
the wrong way”?

No.

Police officers continue to brutalize—

Even at peaceful protests against police brutality, they  
brutalize:

They throw tear gas,

They shoot rubber bullets,

And they storm into crowds of protestors with riot gear and  
batons ready to strike.

Racists show up to these peaceful protests—

They wave their Confederate flags,

They wave their Trump flags,

They wave their American flags,

They yell their slurs,

They run over protestors with their jeeps,

They rip down their signs.

And the black man peacefully waving a sign,

That only begs for his life to matter,  
Continues to be oppressed by the system  
That was built to do so.

Despite the method of protest,  
The issues still remain—  
So why then should your empathy disappear simply because  
someone “protested the wrong way”?

If your compassion for black Americans stops at the way that  
they, and millions of other Americans of varying races,  
choose to protest  
Then you never cared in the first place  
And you are only using the actions of a few  
As an excuse to disguise your apathy,  
As an excuse to justify your actions,  
As an excuse to make no changes,  
As an excuse not to listen,  
As an excuse to keep on going on,  
As an excuse...

But I’m not buying it.  
I see through your excuses,  
Your bullshit,  
Your gaslighting.  
Your apathy.

They said Kaepernick kneeling during the National Anthem,  
an anthem that takes roughly one minute to get through,  
was protesting the wrong way—ignoring the fact that he  
was protesting against police officers that were willing to

kneel on a neck like his for seven minutes and forty-six seconds without remorse.

They said Martin Luther King, Jr. marching was protesting the wrong way—ignoring the fact that he was marching across a bridge that was named after a Confederate officer, Ku Klux Klan grand dragon, and US Senator who would have loved to have lynched him on that very bridge for every white American to watch with delight.

They said Malcolm X telling black Americans to protect themselves by any means necessary was protesting the wrong way—ignoring the fact that white Americans had less than nine years earlier beaten to death a black youth by the name of Emmitt Till and received zero punishment for the murder, that a mob of 200 white Americans threw a bomb onto the bus of the Freedom Riders just three years prior, that police officers were still beating back Americans for wanting to be seen as human, that Confederate flags were still waving over government buildings where Ku Klux Klan members were still being elected into office.

To some, there is no such thing as protesting the right way.  
Kneeling is not the right way,  
Marching is not the right way,  
Talking is not the right way,  
Bearing arms—of which they adore—is not the right way.  
Because it is not the method of the protests that has them  
upset,  
It is the reason for the protests—

RYAN DAVID GINSBERG

Because they don't believe that black Americans deserve  
equality;

They just want them to:

Shut up and dribble,

Shut up and rap,

Shut up and act,

Shut up and entertain us.

They aren't mad at the method of the protests,

They are mad at the ideals of the protests.

And to them,

There will never be a right way.

*Questions For America*

Why are you more offended by an athlete kneeling during a one-minute anthem than you are by an officer, who is sworn to serve and protect the American people, kneeling on an American's neck for seven minutes and forty-six seconds as he proceeds to take that American's life?

When you say that the troops fought to protect our freedoms, aren't some of those freedoms the freedom of protest, the freedom of speech, the freedom of expression?

When I stand and place my hand over my heart and sing to our flag, am I singing to the troops or am I singing to the country that that flag represents?

Am I to stay loyal to my country no matter what my country is doing?

If under the flag Americans are being murdered, am I to just ignore that fact and just be grateful for the things that the flag stands for only in writing but not in practice?

Throughout the existence of our country, who have been the instigators of change?

Who have been the ones fighting for the rights of Americans whose rights were never given to them?

How many protests have occurred in our country's history?

When we look at history, who is most revered?

Were many of them not protestors themselves?

Did they not, too, question the integrity of the United States?

Did they not, also, challenge America to change, improve, and grow?

Who is the true Patriot here: the one who wants his country to be better, or the one who says it is good enough as is?



Why does the soldier go to war, why do they sacrifice their life, what are they fighting for if not for their country to have the freedom to grow, to improve, to progress?

If we only exist to serve our country, to be grateful for the country we have, to honor the flag that is already waving over our head, then why did we leave Britain, why did we create our own nation, why was the country and the flag and the army we already had not enough?

If an athlete is not allowed to protest in the public eye, then when are they supposed to protest?

If athletes should just shut up and dribble, then shouldn't you just shut up and do your work, as well?

Are we not more than the uniforms we wear, am I only my job, are they not human beneath their jersey, are we not all Americans whether or not we have the same worldview?

If I am a triggered snowflake, then what are you when you are so easily offended by a football player taking a knee for one minute while some celebrity sings a song while we all stare at some red, white, and blue threads?

If your hat says 'Make America Great Again' are you not admitting that America, as is, is flawed?

Does that make you less Patriotic?

If you wave a flag from the Confederacy that waged war against America and tried to leave America, and I kneel for an anthem because I believe that our country can be better than it currently is, and I am willing to stay in my flawed country and work to improve my country rather than just abandoning it and starting over, then who is more Patriotic?

You or me?

*Good Christian Men And Good Christian Women*

Many good Christian men and good Christian women  
Refuse to support the Black Lives Matter movement  
Because the Black Lives Matter organization  
Is in favor of gay rights,  
Which they see as a sin;  
Yet, simultaneously,  
These same Christian men and these same Christian women  
Are willing to support a President  
Who used their Bible as a prop,  
Who has spent years sowing nothing but hate  
While their God said sow nothing but love,  
Who has locked God's children in cages,  
Who has threatened his own citizens,  
Who has paid off a porn star  
That he fucked out of wedlock  
While he was married to another woman  
Who was his third wife  
And had just months before birthed his child;  
And the examples go on and on and on  
About how he is a complete contradiction  
Of all their so-called good Christian morals.  
But they—these good Christian men  
And these good Christian women—  
Choose, instead, to draw the line  
With the Black Lives Matter movement.

So I ask:

If you can put your 'good' Christian 'morals' aside

For that man,  
Just because he pretends to be one of you,  
Then why can you not put your 'good' Christian 'morals' aside  
For a movement  
That is advocating for the fair treatment  
And for the respect of life  
For your God's children?

*Furthermore*

Furthermore:  
Have you ever wondered why,  
Of all the sins written in the Bible,  
The one sin that Christians focus most on is  
Homosexuality?  
Well, the answer,  
In my opinion,  
Is quite simple:  
Sins are tempting,  
That's why we are all sinful;  
But to the heterosexual,  
Homosexuality is the least tempting sin of them all.  
Therefore, it is the only sin the heterosexual  
Can guarantee himself or herself never to commit.  
So they've picked that one to hate.  
They have chosen to ignore the fact  
That God said to them  
All it takes is one sin to make you impure.  
We are all sinners,  
We are all impure,  
And we are all, therefore, the same  
In God's eyes.  
But—like in America—  
To the Christian, it is far easier to hate Others.  
So they have chosen homosexuals  
As their Others  
To hate.

They have chosen not to support Black Lives Matter,  
Because the movement refuses to hate the Others  
That they have chosen to hate.  
And they have chosen to ignore the sins of Donald Trump,  
Because he claims to be a Christian man  
Who hates who they have chosen to hate.

And they wonder why I denounced my faith.  
It wasn't because I found flaws with their God,  
It was because I found flaws  
With the ones who claimed to know him best.

IT IS QUITE eerie, the sight of tens of thousands of people wearing masks, trying to keep their distance while simultaneously joining to demand that their country come together to make a fundamental change to who we are as a nation.

There is a global pandemic that has practically shut down our entire nation and yet millions of Americans all across the country still feel that it is their duty to march to the streets and demand change.

If that doesn't tell you the severity of the problem, then I don't know what will.

Our country is at a breaking point and we can stay silent no more.

Too many black Americans, too many brown Americans, too many white Americans, too many *goddamn* Americans have lost their lives at the hands of incompetent police.

That is why we storm the streets amid the COVID-19 outbreak. Because COVID-19 is not the only pandemic occurring in the country that we call home. There is another

pandemic, a larger pandemic, a deadlier pandemic, a pandemic that our country was sickly born with.

Our country is rooted in the racist beliefs of our forefathers, our ancestors, our bothers and our sisters, the writers of our history books, the architects of the systems around us, the Presidents and congress members and Supreme Court justices, and the police officers who are beating and murdering Americans who refuse to bow down to their authority.

*Outrage*

If you are angry about the outrage,  
Do not be angry at the outraged;  
Instead, be angry at those  
Who are the cause of the outrage.  
For, without them,  
There would be nothing  
To be outraged about.



*We Will Not Be Silenced*

You can tear down our signs  
But I promise you they will multiply.  
We will not be silenced  
Until the entire system is destroyed,  
Until our reflection has been revealed,  
Until our past has been uncovered,  
Until our mistakes have been rectified.  
We will not be silenced.  
Our signs may be a nuisance  
But your actions are deadly  
And while signs can never kill  
Your actions have and will again.  
We will not be silenced.  
You can muzzle us,  
Rip down our signs,  
Throw tear gas,  
Shoot rubber bullets,  
Run us over in the streets,  
Threaten us with your militias,  
But we will not be silenced.

ON MAY 29, 2020, the President of the United States tweeted to his 80+ million followers:

“...These THUGS are dishonoring the memory of George Floyd, and I won’t let that happen. Just spoke to Governor Tim Walz and told him that the Military is with him all the way. Any difficulty and we will assume control but, **when the looting starts, the shooting starts**. Thank you!”

• • •

WHILE HUNDREDS OF peaceful protests were occurring throughout the country, there were a few that turned into riots. And with the rioting, came looting. And while it is my belief that some, if not many, participants in the looting and the rioting were infiltrators intending to make the Black Lives Matter movement look violent, I will not deny that there were most certainly some, if not many, participants within the movement who saw the opportunity to loot and riot, and did. Also, I will say that I, along with most within the movement,

do not encourage their actions. In fact, we strongly stand against them. You see, there is little, if anything, to gain in looting and rioting other than to capture the attention of the nation—which may have very well been their intent. However, with that attention, those who are looking for a reason to disengage and to ignore the cries and the demands of the people protesting peacefully, they were then given their reasons.

They went around saying things like:

“I would sympathize with the movement, but I simply cannot condone all of the violence and the looting.”

And: “I would be more inclined to listen, if only they could convey their anger with more constraint.”

And: “They are protesting the wrong way.”

And: “Once they get violent, the cause loses its validity.”

These sorts of people—many of whom found their ways into my direct messages, my text inbox, and across the street from me angrily waving their American flags as I held a cardboard sign with the words ‘Black Lives Matter’ written in Sharpie—seem to be under the impression that police brutality, and the killings of men and women, are no longer an issue because a few Targets got broken into, because some windows were destroyed, because some televisions were stolen, because some property got damaged.

They act as if they can’t possibly stay mad at the police for their murderous actions because some people—halfway connected to the movement—decided to loot some Targets.

• • •

AGAIN, THIS IS just the American way.

It is something that has been intentionally taught to us since we were kids.

We were taught to fear Muslims because a small handful of them concocted a plan to fly planes into the World Trade Center. We were taught that the actions of this small fragment somehow spoke for the 1.8 billion Muslims all across the world; nearly all of whom were and are completely nonviolent people.

We are taught to fear entire nations of people by waging war against their leaders.

We are taught to fear immigrants because they are coming to steal the land that we rightfully stole ourselves.

We are taught to fear entire political parties because the members within that party do not share the same opinions that we do about how to treat Mr. Dow Jones.

We are taught to find differences and to fear people because of those differences.

That is just the American way.

And that is why, when people see a small group within a larger group looting, they choose to associate the entire movement with that small percentage.

Because it is easier to dismiss a group of people than it is to listen to their demands.

• • •

NOW, LET'S TALK about the President of the United States.

The President who has shown time and time again to have no political plan other than to divide the country into two groups:

His allies and his enemies.

He truly is as American as it gets: a divisive fearmonger, a hungry capitalist, an inciter of hate and violence, a man proud of his ignorance, an egotist, a failed businessman who still believes himself to be a corporate genius, and so on and so forth. He has failed time and time again to respond to this country's countless catastrophes with anything other than hate towards those who do not support him. He truly believes that he is only President to those who voted for him, and dictator to those who did not.

He is not the President of the United States, he is not the President of the people, he is only the President of those who he considers an ally.

And he is dictator to everyone else.

• • •

HE—LIKE SO many other Americans—saw the minority of looters and rioters and decided to encapsulate the entire Black Lives Matter movement with their actions. He has repeatedly called protestors terrorists, yet refused to do the same when one of his supporters drove to Kenosha and killed two protestors on his behalf; which happened only after the President praised two old white folks for aiming guns at protestors, he and the party even thanked them for their Patriotism by inviting them to speak at the RNC. And he has continuously celebrated his police officers who continue to show up to peaceful protests with riot gear, tear gas, and rubber bullets; the police officers who, intentionally, turn the peaceful protests into a scene of violence, a scene resembling war, a scene made for TV, a scene that lets Americans believe whatever they want to believe.

He demands that his Army of Police Officers arrive at these peaceful protests fully armed and ready to fight.

He demands that they charge into groups of protestors chanting against his will and beat the sense into them with their batons.

Then, when the protestors begin to run, when the protestors get angry, when the protestors fight back, he calls them violent, he calls them looters, he calls them rioters, he calls them terrorists.

And his followers do the same.

They grab their guns, they drive to the scene, and they wait for the so-called-looting to start—because that's when the shooting starts.

At least that's what their President told them.

• • •

THIS IS NOT unintentional.

The Police State that he desperately wants America to become is not unintentional. Attacking protestors until protestors fight back, then calling the protestors violent, is not unintentional. It is a calculated tactic to give his supporters a reason to say:

“I would sympathize with the movement, but I simply cannot condone all of the violence and the looting.”

And: “I would be more inclined to listen, if only they could convey their anger with more constraint.”

And: “They are protesting the wrong way.”

And: “Once they get violent, the cause loses its validity.”

It is yet another tactic of the party to turn this simple cry for civil rights into a war of:

Us versus Others.

And their followers get in line.

Together they say:

“It is a hoax.”

“It is propaganda.”

“It is not true.”

“It is communism.”

“It is fascism.”

“It is the left trying to control us.”

“They are trying to destroy the very fabric of America.”

*The President Tweeted Again*

When the looting starts, the shooting starts;  
Unless you're looting for me.  
Unless you protest for me.  
Unless you bear arms and storm inside of  
Government buildings for me.  
Unless you bow down to me.  
Unless you declare me your king.  
Otherwise, I'm going straight for the head.  
I'll put the liberals to bed—  
The THUGS, the fake news, the haters—  
And wave a new flag over their graves.  
Flags with my name  
And my face  
With my crown.  
So go on, call me your king...  
Or the shooting starts.



*Historical Villain*

With every historical villain  
Comes millions of citizens  
Who followed their lead.  
Citizens who did not question,  
Who did not waiver,  
Who did not prevent the villain  
From having the chance  
Of becoming historical  
In the first place.

HYPOCRITE! HYPOCRITE! HYPOCRITE!

How can I demand that a nation not judge our protests by the few rioters among us, while simultaneously protesting against the entire police force for the actions of only a few officers?

Let's start with the police:

It is the inaction of the police officers—and police departments—all across this country that makes them, even if indirectly, culpable in the actions of only a few of them. Far too often the police officers involved in the killings that get public attention—which only happens because a bystander was there to film the act and post it online—have had multiple complaints filed against them in the past; complaints that never did make it into the public eye, and therefore no actions were thought to be needed. Meaning the police department knew these people to be violent and dangerous and irrational and unprofessional, but still did nothing more than file the complaint away and hope that no one came snooping. Therefore, it is the inaction before the murder takes place—when the red flags are high in the sky, when the warning signs

are obvious, when the life of the soon-to-be murder victim can still be saved—that leads to their guilt by association.

And yes, I know some officers—not most, not many, but some; and not nearly enough—do end up getting fired for their actions, and condemned by their department and colleagues, and criminally charged, but only after petitions have been signed, marches have been had, demands have been made, and the hand has been forced against their own.

Otherwise, if no one had noticed, if no one had been there to film it and post it online, if protests did not occur, it would have just become another incident in their file.

• • •

AN ARGUMENT I often hear is:

*You can't judge all police because of a few bad apples.*

Sure.

I guess.

But you can judge a police force for knowingly allowing corrupt officers to wear their badges, to keep their guns, and to represent them. By actively and knowingly and willingly and blissfully putting these 'few bad apples' on the street every day, well aware that they are bad apples, you lose your ability to separate yourself from them.

You are them, they are you, you are one.

And all it takes is one bad apple to spoil the bunch.

• • •

WHICH BRINGS ME to the rioters.

Most protestors do not see looting and rioting and just pick up a rock and throw it at the closest window; they do not

join in. Most protestors do not see looting and rioting and just stand by, telling anyone who tries to stop them to back up, they do not just place their hands on their hips and stare at the camera recording the crime and try to block them from filming the scene; they do not make themselves complicit. Most protestors do not see looting and rioting and say, "They are only our bad apples, let them be."

They, instead, try to stop the looters and the rioters, because they do not want those actions representing them.

They see the bad apples among them, and they immediately act to throw them out.

They distance themselves.

They do not give them their uniform, their badge, and their permission to do whatever it is that the bad apples want to do.

• • •

SO WHEN POLICE officers stop seeing a knee on the neck of a human being and decide, instead of stopping their colleague, to join in with a knee to the back and to the legs; and when police officers stop seeing a man's life being stripped before their eyes and decide, instead of stopping their colleagues, to stand watch while their colleagues become murderers and attempt only to block the crime from being filmed; and when police officers stop putting their bad apples, knowingly, on the street to murder human beings; then I will stop protesting.

But until then, it's game on.

Until the tree has been cut down.

And all the bad apples are gone.

*Hypocrisy*

The hypocrisy of this country  
Is overwhelming.  
We cherry-pick our facts,  
Manipulate our videos,  
And believe only what  
We want to believe.  
We hide behind religion created thousands of years ago,  
Then hide behind laws written hundreds of years ago,  
Then hide behind opinions told to us last night by Tucker  
Carlson.  
We're pro-life  
When it comes to unborn fetuses  
But when it comes to wearing masks  
That could save already living human beings,  
Making them the most pro-life accessory on the planet,  
All of a sudden it's my body,  
My choice.  
We protest shutdowns,  
Storm government buildings while bearing arms,  
Scream in officers' faces  
For suggesting that we keep our communities safe.  
We demand haircuts,  
Demand clubs,  
Demand sit-down restaurants,  
Demand crowded beaches  
Even if it means  
Some innocent people must die;  
Then we call protests

Calling for the end of the  
Slaughtering of black Americans  
Violent  
And anarchist  
And fascist  
And anti-American,  
Because we don't like their cardboard signs.  
We thank our troops  
For fighting for our rights,  
Then fight against our opponents'  
Rights to express their different opinions.

And I am guilty, too,  
Of paradoxical views.  
I am overfilled with biases towards those  
That I disagree with.  
I am judgmental  
And hypercritical.  
I have found myself stuck in an echo chamber  
That I can't seem to find the exit of—  
Because I haven't even bothered to look.

The hypocrisy flowing through my veins  
Is overwhelming.

I am as American as it gets.

*With Us Or Against Us*

In America  
These days  
It is all or nothing:  
You're either with us or against us,  
Racist or anti-racist,  
Evil or pure,  
Sinful or angelic.  
We cast stones at first movements,  
We are quick to judgment,  
We are unafraid to attack our allies  
If they don't speak the same as we do.

We are angry,  
And justifiably so;  
But with anger,  
Rationale is often  
Thrown out the window.  
Bullets are too quick to fly,  
Innocent lives are lost,  
And none of us can win.

We create mobs  
And join them  
Without always knowing  
What the mob  
Is fighting for.

We are often judged

By tidbits without context,  
Solidified as monsters  
For past mistakes  
We are now ashamed of  
And wish to rectify,  
We are stunted  
By association  
And made unable to grow  
Into the beautiful flowers  
We may have one day become.  
We are forced into corners,  
Forced into statements,  
Forced into boxes,  
Forced into shadows,  
Forced into societal cells  
For crimes sometimes misunderstood  
And often unintentional.

We are amid a cultural revolution  
Where we warriors  
Are trying to lead  
While simultaneously learning  
How to fight  
And discovering  
Every day  
What exactly it is  
We are fighting for.

We are an army  
Without a definitive leader  
To turn to



For advice,  
For guidance,  
For reassurance,  
For mediation,  
For strategizing,  
For unity,  
For tranquility.

We are angry,  
We are heartbroken,  
We are dissatisfied,  
We are untrusting,  
We are abandoned,  
We are disillusioned,  
We are disenfranchised,  
We are exhausted,  
And all we want to do is  
Fight  
Back!

But while we have waited  
Far too long,  
We must also take a pause,  
We must assess the situation,  
We must find our allies  
And we must allow them to be flawed,  
For we must keep them by our side.  
Because if we estrange ourselves  
From potential allies  
For ignorances they wish  
To rid themselves from,

Then we force ourselves to fight  
With fewer and fewer soldiers.  
If we alienate teammates,  
Destroy their lives,  
Wreck their images,  
Crush their existence,  
Then where else  
Do we expect them to go  
But against us?

After all, in America  
These days  
It is all or nothing:  
You're either with us  
Or against us.  
And I'd rather have more for us  
Than against.

WE HAVE DEHUMANIZED human beings here in America. We have turned them into hashtags, viral videos, trendy movements, picket signs, memes, and then, when the next one comes, we move on and forget.

For a while there is outrage. For a while there are protests. For a while there are tweets, Facebook posts, Instagram stories. And for a while there are hashtags.

But time passes and people forget.

I sometimes find myself wondering how long would the outrage have lasted if the Holocaust had happened in the modern world. What would the hashtag have been? How long would it have trended? How long would it have been until we forgot and moved on to the next movement?

How long will we be angry this time around?

How long until we forget and move on?

How long?

*Performative Activists*

In America, we only care about things  
Until they are no longer trending,  
Until they are no longer hip,  
Until the next cool thing  
To care about  
Is told to us  
Through another flashy  
Hashtag.

The Amazon is still burning,  
But we have moved on.  
Yemen is still under attack,  
But we have moved on.  
Children are still locked in detention centers,  
But we have moved on.  
Sex trafficking is still rampant,  
But we have moved on.  
All of our favorite brands are still using slave labor,  
But we have moved on.  
China is still running re-education camps,  
But we have moved on.  
COVID-19 is still ravaging our country,  
But we have moved on.  
Climate Change is still destroying our only planet,  
But we have moved on.  
Police are still brutalizing protestors,  
But we have moved on.  
Our President is currently trying to undermine our democracy,

But we have moved on.

In America, too often,  
We are performative activists,  
Posting things to our Instagram stories  
Then going about our lives  
Completely unchanged.  
We post about protests  
That we only attended  
To take a couple of photographs  
To show the world  
How woke  
We can pretend to be.  
We scream "Black Lives Matter!"  
Then go about our privileged lives  
Unaware and uneducated  
About our daily micro-aggressions,  
About our daily advantages,  
About our unconscious biases  
That are affecting real-life human beings  
Every day.

We put down our protest signs,  
Go to a nearby beach,  
And post pictures  
Of our feet in the sand—  
But what about the black man  
We were just  
Fighting for?  
While we put our signs down,  
And move on,

What is he to do with his black skin?  
There is no removing it for him,  
No putting his black skin down.  
His feet,  
No matter how much sand covers them up,  
Remain black;  
And he remains in danger  
In a country  
That only bothers to fight  
For his right  
To life  
When a trendy hashtag comes out,  
And everybody  
Is posting black squares to their Instagram feed  
From the comfort of a sandy beach.  
But what is he to do  
With his black skin  
When the trend is over  
And he is left,  
Once more,  
To deal with the issues  
That don't disappear  
Just because a hashtag  
Is no longer trending?  
What is he to do then?  
Where is he to put  
His black skin  
When the black squares  
Are no more?

*Aftermath*

History is not written in the moment:  
It is written with hindsight  
And with evidence of the aftermath.  
The villain is not decided  
Until the villainy cannot be undone,  
Until the meteorite has crashed  
And the crater has been irrevocably formed  
And the damage has been done  
And the narrative has been  
Permanently etched into the stone.

The choices you make today,  
The words you say,  
The actions you take,  
The men and women in power you support  
Will be scrutinized at a later date,  
When history is ready to be written.  
And it is then that the truth  
Will be decided, revealed, and sealed.  
With the evidence of the aftermath  
Of what you have done,  
Of what you supported to have done,  
Of what you stood idly by as you watched being done.

IN SCHOOL I was taught that the Civil War was fought for many reasons and that only one of those many reasons had anything to do with slavery; in fact, slavery was, according to my school teachers, just a minor part of the disagreement; while, in actuality, according to them, the war was mostly about the Southerners bravely defending states' rights.

I was taught that Malcolm X was a violent man, an inciter of hate, a man to be feared, no hero at all, the polar opposite of the peaceful MLK.

I was taught that the Black Panthers was a terrorist group created to destroy White America.

I was taught that Christopher Columbus discovered America and fathered it, and that none of us would be here, in America, if not for him.

I was taught that colonizers and the Natives nicely worked out deals over who would get what land and who would get slaughtered, instead.

I was taught that Christianity was the holiest of all religions, the truest of all religions; the only true religion.



I was taught that the Christian God was a white man, that Jesus Christ was a white man, that the disciples were white men, and heard nothing of the brown skin that surrounded them.

I was taught that some slave owners were actually quite nice to their slaves and that some slaves actually quite liked their lives at the plantation and that some slave owners were actually really great Christian men, who loved their god and loved their slaves and loved their America.

I was taught that slavery ended with the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment.

I was taught that the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s cured racism.

I was taught that drugs were so bad that people who found themselves on drugs deserved to be thrown into prison for a long, long time for their bad, bad decisions.

I was taught that America is the greatest country in the world, that America is the freest country in the world, that America is a democratic nation, that America only goes to war to save the rest of the world, that America is the land every dreamer dreams of one day calling home, that America is the world's greatest experiment and that the experiment is going swimmingly, that America has opportunities for every single American to succeed, that America is welcoming to the tired and also to the poor and also to the weak, that America is a melting pot made up of all races that are all seen as equal and all can do whatever they please under the American flag, that anyone in America who is unsuccessful is simply lazy and unwilling to pull themselves up by their bootstrap, that America...

• • •

IN AMERICA, WE look at history, or at countries around the world today, and wonder, "How did those fools believe the lies that they were told?"

We think it when we think of Nazi Germany, we think it now when we think of Kim Jong Un's North Korea and Vladimir Putin's Russia. We think the citizens were and are fools for believing the lies their leaders told them.

Hitler said, "Jews bad, us good," and the Germans believed him.

Kim Jong Un says, "World bad, us good," and the North Koreans believe him.

Putin says, "World bad, us good, America ours," and the Russians believe him.

We see this in our history books and we think to ourselves:

"Them bad, us good; them dumb, us smart; them fools, us free."

"Now stand," says our teacher, "and pledge your allegiance to our beautiful, free, incredible country."

So we do. We stand. We place our hands over our hearts. And our teacher says, "Ready, and begin."

And so we begin.

• • •

BUT NEVER DO we stop and think, Why do we always believe what our leaders tell us, what our teachers tell us, what our history books tell us, what our newscasters tell us?

Well, the answer is quite simple:

We believe the world as it is presented to us. That is what everybody does. That is what all humans do.

We often don't choose our beliefs: we just accept or fight against the beliefs that are told to us.

I consider myself a very liberal man—if that has not yet become abundantly clear throughout this book. But this liberalism within me is simply a concoction of all of my life experiences. If I was born in another state, in another home, to another family, with the exact same genetic makeup as I have now, it is incredibly likely that my political opinions would differ, even if only slightly. I am only an accumulation of my experiences. You are only an accumulation of your experiences. They are only an accumulation of their experiences.

And we, as Americans, are an accumulation of the world that has been presented to us.

We see America as we are told to see America.

But sometimes people lie.

• • •

THE MISEDUCATION OF America is not unintentional; it is deliberate and calculated.

There is a reason why they make us stand and place our hands over our hearts and pledge our allegiance to America as early as the age of five. It's because if we do it every day for the thirteen years that we are in school, then it is significantly more likely that we will graduate from school as Patriotic Americans, eager to serve our country.

“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.”

What a fucking foolish saying that we so eagerly swallow up.

Why?

Because we believe the world as it is presented to us

• • •

LISTEN, THIS MAY not be a popular belief, but I don't care:

We—as human beings—do not exist to serve our countries, our countries exist to serve us. Without citizens, a country ceases to exist; without countries, humans continue to exist.

Over the duration of human existence, countries and kingdoms have come and gone; humans have remained.

Germany in 1942 is not the same Germany that exists today, in 2020; is it the Germans' responsibility to always serve their country, no matter which version it is? And as for America, am I to simply support it just because it is where I happened to have been born? Should I turn a blind eye to our injustices? Should I support our killings? Should I help with our oppression? Should I join in on our racist chants? Should I, too, open up my very own detention center, where I separate kids from their mothers and from their fathers, and abuse them, mistreat them, torture them, then take our taxpayers' money and reinvest it with Mr. Dow Jones, simply because that is what we do here in the America I was born in?

Would that make me a good American?

Would that make me a good little Patriot?

Would that make you proud?

• • •

WE DO NOT exist to serve America; America exists to serve us.

And right now America is not serving all of us; in fact, I think it would be fair to say that America has never served all of us—only the pieces of us that it has wanted to serve.

But that is not what we are taught in school. Instead, we are taught that this country is a wonderful place and that we must all be loyal Patriots to this wonderful country of ours.

Before our wonderful school lessons can begin, we must stand, place our hand over our heart, and say:

*I pledge allegiance  
To the flag  
Of the United States of America  
And to the republic  
For which it stands  
One nation  
Under God  
Indivisible  
With liberty  
And justice for all.*

At five years old we are taught those words. At five years old we are told to pledge our allegiance to this country. At five years old we are told to dedicate our lives to America. At five years old we are told that this country is indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

At five years old we are told many fairy tales—about Santa Claus, and about the Tooth Fairy, and about how America has liberty and justice for all.

• • •

THE MISEDUCATION OF America is not unintentional.

The system we see around us is very much intentional.

*Untangle*

We must consciously untangle  
The propaganda in our minds  
That was fed to us  
In schools  
With statewide tests  
And nationwide lies.

*Our Freedom Is Not Unlimited*

Our freedom is not unlimited.  
Though we like to pretend  
That our freedom is like the universe:  
Ever-expanding toward infinity.  
But, in reality,  
Our freedom is like the continental United States,  
Boarded up and bordered up,  
And the totality of our freedom is  
Contingent on which borders  
Surround us,  
Enclose us,  
Imprison us.

We are free, yes,  
But only until we reach the borders  
Of where that freedom extends.

We are free to live,  
Free to be,  
But only if we agree  
To stay within the margins  
Assigned to our skin,  
Our religion,  
Our economic status,  
Our intellectual abilities,  
Our work ethic,  
Our class,  
Our family heritage,

And so on.  
We are free to speak,  
Free to say whatever we please,  
But only if what we speak  
Is in agreement with the people  
Who happen to be around us  
When we speak those things.

We are free to believe  
What everyone around us  
Believes.

We are free to be allegiant  
As long as that allegiance  
Is only to the United States.

We are free to vote  
If only we agree to vote  
For the man already in charge,  
Otherwise,  
Our freedom may just be purged—  
For we have proven,  
With our lack of conformity,  
That we no longer  
Deserve such freedoms.

We are free to be free,  
As long as we remain  
Inside the borders  
Of our freedom.



Do not try to reach beyond—  
For you will not like  
What you find;  
You will not like the discovery  
Of what exists beyond  
Our freedom,  
Beyond the universe  
That we are boarded and bordered within.

IN AMERICA, WE erect statues of slave owners in the South, wave Confederate flags over government buildings, and name schools and army bases and bridges after Confederate generals as a way to glorify and honor the horrible things that they once did to fellow human beings, and to send signals to certain Americans that we, as a country, are capable of doing it again.

We in America defend these immortalizations of cruel, horrific, terrible human beings as necessary historical documents; as if history books and museums do not exist, as if the only way to learn about Robert E. Lee is to visit his statues or the schools he is named after.

To the people who think this—that statues are necessary historical documents and not just immortalizations and glorifications of horrible men—I ask you this:

How is it that Germans can remember the atrocities of Adolf Hitler without a single statue of Adolf Hitler anywhere in the streets of Germany? How is it that they were able to knock down every Adolf Hitler statue and still remember the history he forced upon their country and upon the world?

How can they remember without statues in the street to remind them?

How can they know of their atrocities without waving Nazi flags?

Simple.

It is because they have books. They have museums. They have access to the Internet. They have countless ways to learn about their history. They have statues, instead, of the victims of Hitler; they have memorials for them, and not glorifications and immortalizations of the horrific human being—and human beings—who victimized them.

Because that is what statues are for.

To honor.

That is the reason they do not have a statue of Hitler in Germany. They do not want to honor him. They do not want the Jews—or the numerous other victims of the Nazis' hate—to feel that Germany still, deep down, wants to murder them, wants to lock them in concentration camps, wants to gas them until they cannot breathe.

So why then do we, in the United States of America, feel the need to honor Confederate generals—Confederate generals who fought against the United States of America, who killed American citizens, and who did it all in the name of slavery? They created the Confederacy because they would rather own black human beings than be part of an America where slavery was outlawed.

Do not let your history teachers lie to you, do not let the politicians revise American history; the Confederacy existed for one reason and one reason only: because they valued their right to own slaves more than they valued their right to be called American citizens.

The Confederacy was so anti-America that they waged a war against America as everyone within the Confederacy attempted to leave America because they thought their rights to own slaves was more important than the honor of being called American.

I repeat:

The Confederacy was so anti-America that they waged a war against America as everyone within the Confederacy attempted to leave America because they thought their rights to own slaves was more important than the honor of being called American.

I repeat:

The Confederacy was so anti-America that they waged a war against America as everyone within the Confederacy attempted to leave America because they thought their rights to own slaves was more important than the honor of being called American.

I re...

•••

SO, IF CONFEDERATES were anti-America, were traitors, were murderers, were slave owners, then why is it that they are still revered in this country today? Why is it that they are still honored? Why is it that they are immortalized in the form of statues, in the form of schools and army bases and libraries, and why are there so many streets named in their honor all over the United States of America—including in places that were not even a part of the Confederacy, including in places where the Confederacy fought and killed the Americans of that area?

Well, the answer is quite simple:

It's because they—the Confederate generals now immortalized and glorified and constantly honored—were bigots that sacrificed their life and their country for the right to own a black man, and some Americans—the defenders of these flags, of these statues, of these 'Southern ideals' and 'Southern heritage' and 'Southern traditions' and Southern sons—wish that they, too, could own their very own black man, could make a black man do whatever they demanded, could rape a black woman and make her husband watch as they did it, could whip a black man, could make a black man take care of their land while they became rich just like the Confederates did and fought for their right to continue to do.

They are envious that they were born in a time when such things are no longer permitted in the United States of America.

They do not want to keep their statues so that they can remember history—they can just read a book or watch a documentary or visit a museum or search the Internet for that—instead, they want to keep the statues up so that the black men and women in America who pass by those statues can be reminded that America once owned them, and that, if certain Americans got their way, they could own them again.

• • •

THE CONFEDERACY EXISTED for only five years—that's it. And the only thing they did in those five years were:

Attempt to leave America;

Hold desperately to their right to own and demean black human beings;

Wage a war against America;

And kill Americans who only wanted to keep their country united.

Yet, you so-called Patriots want to honor them? Want to glorify them? Want to proudly call them a part of your heritage?

How can you—in all sincerity—call yourself a Patriot while waving the flag of your enemy? How can you call yourself American while glorifying the very men who tried to abandon America? How can you call yourself a Christian man while loving someone who enslaved and beat and raped and killed your God's children?

How can you wave that flag?

And how can you defend their statues?

• • •

ONCE MORE, I take you back to Nazi Germany—unfortunately, the greatest source of metaphor there is.

What would you say if Nazi generals were erected in the form of statues in Jewish neighborhoods, 100 years after World War II had ended, as a response to a Civil Rights movement involving Jewish Germans; in the same way that many Confederate statues were built in black neighborhoods in the 1960s as a response to the Civil Rights movement? What would you say if Nazi flags were still waving over Germany's government buildings to this day? What would you say if Germans walked around with swastikas on their T-shirts? What would you say if Jewish children went to schools named after infamous Nazis?

How would you feel if you were Jewish in a place like that?

That is the plight of the black man in America.

Everywhere they go, they are reminded of the times that America considered them three-fifths of a human being; and the only reason they were even willing to consider them partially human was because the South wanted their votes to have more power against that of the North; otherwise, they would have gladly considered the black man non-human.

• • •

SO, WHEN WE argue that Confederate flags should be removed, when we demand that every statue of a Confederate general, or a slave trader, or a slave owner, or a Ku Klux Klan member should be removed; that is the reason.

Because we know these statues are not there to serve as historical documents; but, instead, are placed there only to threaten black Americans.

To remind them of their place in American history.

To remind them of what we have done to them.

To remind them that we can do it again.

And that is why we say:

Tear.

Them.

Down.

• • •

WE, AS TRUE Americans, will not glorify our enemy in an attempt to scare our own citizens.

We, as true Americans, will not allow our citizens to be terrorized.

We, as true Americans, will not allow our country to fall backward.

We, as true Americans, will continue to push our country forward.

We, as true Americans, will make this country the great place of freedom and opportunity and equality that it has always promised to be, the great place of freedom and opportunity and equality that it has never been before.

We, as true Americans, will not abandon America, will not secede in hopes of creating a new nation; even if the America we live in today does not represent the America we want to live in tomorrow, we will stay; and we will fight to make it better.



*What It Feels Like To Be American In 2020*

I see those who are protesting my protests  
And wonder if it is I who is in the wrong.  
I see those who continue to support a man  
Who I see as the devil incarnate;  
And all the while  
They are wearing a cross around their neck  
And are quoting the Bible,  
Of which I believe their man  
Represents the exact opposite of.  
And I can't help but wonder to myself:  
Am I the crazy one  
Or is it them?  
What are they seeing  
That I can't see?  
Are my biases blurring my vision?  
How is it that  
When that man speaks  
We hear two different things?  
How is that  
What I hear as scientific truth,  
They hear as another thing to debate,  
As another hoax,  
As another conspiracy?  
When two opposite realities present themselves  
From the same situation—  
When I see A  
And they see B—  
Only one of us can be right.

Right?  
So, which of us is it?  
Which of us is blinded  
By our ignorance,  
By our biases,  
By our desires to see one thing  
While the opposite exists?  
Which of us is insane?  
Is it you,  
Or is it me,  
Or is it all of us?

*When Did We Allow?*

When did we allow our flag—  
The red, white, and blue;  
The stars and the stripes;  
America, America—  
To become a symbol of hate?  
When did we allow our flag  
To become the antithesis  
Of human rights,  
Of scientific truth,  
Of love and compassion?  
When did we allow our flag  
To become a piece of clothing,  
A prop for political division,  
A manipulative tool  
For only half of our country to use?  
When did we allow our flag  
To be defiled,  
Defamed,  
And depraved?  
When did we allow our flag  
To lose its meaning of unity,  
Of collaboration,  
Of civil discourse?  
And what will we do,  
As Americans,  
To save our flag;  
To save our country?

*While America Collapses*

While America collapses  
I am writing this:  
A book full of poems,  
A book full of critiques,  
A book full of observations,  
A book full of hypocrisy,  
A book full of ignorance,  
A book full of pleas;  
A collection of expressions  
Of the heartbreak I am feeling.

While America collapses  
I am trying to understand:  
When did we let this happen  
To the nation my teachers promised  
Was the greatest nation in the world?

While America collapses  
I am looking around:  
And it is not what I imagined.  
I imagined September 11<sup>th</sup>, but nationwide—  
Explosions  
And buildings burning  
And people jumping to their death.  
I imagined enemy troops storming the streets of our cities—  
*Los Angeles has been seized!*  
*New York City has been seized!*  
*Miami has been seized!*

*Houston has been seized!*

I imagined the seizers  
Lining rebels up in the street,  
Where moments later their bodies  
Would be filled with bullets  
And in mass graves  
They would be buried.  
I imagined camps filled with Americans  
Whose lives would be sucked from their bodies,  
Slowly  
And painfully,  
Their bodies zombified, yet still working,  
Until eventually even their bodies  
Released their will to live.

But instead, the collapse of America  
Looks like a President  
Tweeting hate from the Oval Office;  
It looks like Americans waging war  
Against scientific truth;  
It's Americans refusing  
To accept  
That life has changed  
Forever;  
It is police officers brutalizing protestors  
At protests against police brutality;  
It is federal agents  
Rolling into Portland,  
Dressed in camouflage,  
As if they were going to war against American citizens,  
Arresting them for protesting

And locking them in unmarked vans  
Taking them to undisclosed locations;  
It is the President of the United States  
Ordering tear gas  
Against those who disagree with him  
Just so he can take a picture  
Of him holding a Bible  
In front of a church  
Of a god  
That he is the antithesis of;  
It is the Press Secretary saying,  
“Science shouldn’t stand in the way”;  
It is the Vice President saying  
That CDC guidelines  
Should not guide  
The way of America;  
It is one America,  
Two America,  
Red America,  
Blue America,  
All waging war  
Against themselves;  
It is hospitals being overrun  
By a disease  
That our White House  
Refuses to take seriously;  
It is dead bodies being thrown  
Into refrigerated vans  
Because people are dying  
Quicker than hospitals  
Can dispose of them;

It is Mitch McConnell  
And Brian Kemp  
And all the others  
Removing voting booths  
And purging voters  
And stealing elections  
And attempting to shut down the United States Postal Service;  
It is Americans waving American flags  
As a symbol of their hate;  
It is Facebook posts  
And Instagram stories  
And tweets  
And videos from basements.

The collapse of America is all around us,  
Disguising itself as  
Every day life  
In America.

While America collapses  
I could fly a plane over the nation  
And not even see the destruction:  
I would not see the 200,000 dead  
(And still counting),  
I would not see the tweet-storms,  
I would not see the distress,  
I would not see the racial slurs  
Being screamed at protestors  
On the street  
While American flags  
Wave over their

*Make America Great Again* hats,  
I would not see the lack  
Of masks  
As regard for human life  
Is tossed away  
By those who always claimed  
To be pro-life.

From up there,  
In the sky,  
In that plane,  
Everything would seem fine.  
While America collapses.



EVERYTHING THAT I say against Donald Trump, and the so-called Republicans that support him, and the Fox News propaganda machine that fuels him, and so on, is not an attack on the conservative group of Americans once known as the Republican party. I know there are many conservatives out there—true conservatives, real conservatives—who do not believe in the bullshit that is attempting to pass now as the new Republican party.

I see you.

I know there are many of you out there—in fact, countless of you are among my closest friends.

And I respect your ability and willingness to go against the loudest voices of your party. Because that's what we—as Americans—must do when our party gets out of line.

We are not Republicans.

We are not Democrats.

We are Americans.

All of our voices—as different as they are—need to be heard.

And if our party of choice refuses to listen to our voices, then it is okay to go against them. It doesn't make us weak; it makes us strong. We do not owe them our loyalty.

We are not here to serve them.

They are here to serve us.

And if they don't serve us anymore—if they aren't fighting for what we are passionate about—then we mustn't be afraid to speak against them.

Their candidates do not automatically earn our vote simply because they are of the party that we most often align. These parties do not and should not shape our opinions, our morals, our desires; instead, we, as voters and as Americans, need to ensure these parties are shaped by us—the people.

If our party gets out of line, it is okay to speak against them, it is okay to vote against them, it is even okay to switch sides. If they decide—like Mitch McConnell or Lindsey Graham or Ted Cruz or Devin Nunes, or all the others—to shift their allegiance from the American people to their political party and their seat of power, then it is okay to abandon them; as they have abandoned you.

As they have abandoned us.

Parties have shifted numerous times throughout history. New parties have come and old parties have gone.

And it will happen again.

• • •

I TYPICALLY LEAN left when it comes to most issues, that much is pretty fucking obvious by now. I have almost always

voted Democrat, and I will again in this upcoming Presidential election. But I am not a loyalist to the Democratic party. In fact, I am desperately hoping that a new party comes along, and ideally soon. I think the Democratic party—much like the Republican party, much like this country as a whole—is at a breaking point.

And I fucking hope it breaks.

I hope they both break.

I hope everything around us breaks and makes room for something new, something better.

These parties have worked tirelessly to divide this country, to divide us all; they have gone with the classic saying:

Divide and conquer.

But we, as Americans, must unite to fight against them.

I don't care what party you most typically align with—we all have our differing opinions—but whatever you do, do not compromise your morals because you believe you owe allegiance to a political party that has gone rogue.

You do not need to support a tyrant, nor his minions, simply because they wear the jersey of your favorite team.

You owe them nothing.

They do not own you.

You are still you without them.

Do not let their actions, their beliefs, their moral compasses—or lack thereof—define you and defile you.

History is watching...

What will you do?

*Deal-Breaker*

To future generations who are wondering:  
No, not all Trump supporters supported his racist,  
Divisive,  
Anti-science,  
Fearmongering rhetoric.  
Some of his supporters  
Even condemned those aspects of him.  
However, none of it was ever a deal-breaker for them.  
It wasn't a deal-breaker when he said Mexico was sending  
over their rapists,  
It wasn't a deal-breaker when he called for violence against  
protestors at his rallies,  
It wasn't a deal-breaker when he continued to say that  
COVID-19 would just simply disappear even while tens  
of thousands of Americans continued to die,  
It wasn't a deal-breaker when audio was released of him  
admitting that he deliberately misled the people about the  
dangers of COVID-19 to avoid a 'panic'; even though his  
Twitter feed is filled with nothing but panic-stricken  
tweets about how the Democrats are coming to destroy  
the very fabric of America, about how they are trying to  
steal the election by letting Americans vote, about how he  
is the only possible savior to the incoming communists  
and socialists and fascists and revisionists and so on.  
It wasn't a deal-breaker when he ranted about unfounded  
conspiracy theories during press briefings and rallies.  
It wasn't a deal-breaker when he refused to release his tax  
returns, nor when the *New York Times* finally released his

tax returns, and it turned out he was hardly paying his taxes at all.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he was accused of sexual assault by 25 different women.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he colluded with Russia.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he attempted a quid pro quo with Ukraine.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he was impeached.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he called protestors terrorists.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he discouraged American people from wearing masks during a highly contagious pandemic that he was well aware of the dangers of.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he gave tax breaks to Mr. Dow Jones and all of his friends, leaving the rest of America to pick up the slack.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he ordered families to be ripped apart at the border.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he attempted to ban Muslims from our country as a way of protecting America from imaginary terrorists.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he gassed protestors so he could take a picture with a Bible he has never read.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he attacked the media as a ploy to make him the only source of information.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he blocked witnesses from testifying against him.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he called fallen soldiers 'losers' and 'suckers'.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he refused to denounce his most violent supporters because they voted for him and that was all he truly cared about.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he ignored the bounties on his own soldiers' heads.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he praised violent tyrants for knowing how to properly keep their citizens in line.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he constantly attempted to undermine the legitimacy of the American election and tried to sow doubt among his supporters about any result that didn't have him remaining in office.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he threatened to dismiss election results or asked for ballots to be tossed out.

It wasn't a deal-breaker when he rushed the nomination of his third Supreme Court Justice just a month away from the election—despite him and every other Republican, just four years earlier, saying the choice should be left up to the American people in November—simply because he believed she, and therefore his new Court, would bow down to his authoritarian demands.

It wasn't a deal-breaker...

Because nothing he did was ever a deal-breaker.

So, while his supporters didn't always support what he said,

Nor everything that he did,

They never stopped supporting him.

Even as he continued his racist,

Divisive,

Anti-science,

Fearmongering rhetoric.

And that's how they should be remembered.

*Christians For Trump*

There is no such thing as  
*Christians For Trump*;  
There are only  
Previously religious folks  
Who have denounced their God  
For a new faith in Trumpism.  
They have been blinded,  
Misguided,  
Led astray,  
And I pray that the God  
They abandoned for this man  
Finds them again  
And brings them home.

*What Am I To Do With The Friend?*

I am often conflicted with these thoughts:  
What am I to do with the friend  
Who is so morally opposed to myself?  
How do I justify being friends with a person  
Who not only tolerates a hateful man,  
But encourages him,  
Votes for him,  
Donates to his campaigns,  
Wears his symbols of hate,  
Waves the man's flags proudly?  
How do I maintain a friendship with someone  
Who stands for everything I hate?  
And is it moral of me to remain friends with such a person?  
Is it my duty to shame them,  
Erase them from my life,  
Extricate myself from them?  
Or is it my duty to stay by their side,  
To show them the sins of their way,  
To show them the flaws within their ideals,  
To be a light within their darkness?  
Or is my friendship complicity?  
Is it my duty to change them?  
Am I to be their light  
Or will their darkness only dim me?  
What am I to do with the friend  
Who is so morally opposed to myself?



MY MOTHER USED to ask, “Would you jump off a cliff just because your friends did it?”

I always told her no, yet many times since I have jumped off of cliffs and splashed into open waters all over the world just because my friends did it. And many times more I have followed the influence of friends down roads we never should have traveled.

But before I reveal to you where those roads led, and what I did as I ran upon them, let me first pose a few questions:

If hypothetically I am not the first to jump, if I am only the second, or third, or fourth, or, hell, even the fifth, does that make me any less of a fool than the first?

If, let’s say, jumping off cliffs was nothing more than a metaphor for something worse, and I am just the fifth person tagging along, am I still as culpable as the one who led the charge?

If—and again this is only hypothetical—I was to say a thing that no boy should ever say—but I swear I only did it because of my friends! yes, only ever because of my friends!—is my tongue still responsible?

If I were to look back at those actions with deep-rooted regret, is it possible for me to be forgiven, or are these actions forever a definitive part of who I am as a person? At what age am I no longer allowed to change or evolve?

If I was raised in a town that told me lies, that told me these actions were okay, and I was just simply obeying, following along with the lives I saw around me, do these actions still define me? Or do they just define my town? Or do they only define one small moment in my ever-evolving life?

•••

LET'S MOVE ON.

To things slightly less hypothetical, to things that closely borderline reality.

Mostly because they are, in fact, reality.

•••

MY EVOLUTION IS recorded for me to cringe at in so many corners of the Internet.

At one time I placed a part of myself on MySpace, then on Facebook, then on Twitter, then on Blogspot, then on HotNewHipHop, then on YouTube, then on Amazon, etc. etc. Like a photo album, I can look back at my past thoughts, at my past conversations, at my past arguments, at my past revelations. I can see who I once was. I can look back at the roads I traveled upon in my youth. I can see what I did as I traveled upon them. I can see the cliffs I've jumped off of. The Internet serves as a sort of portal, and when I look back, here is something I see:

I was an extremely flawed, ignorant, unaware child.

I knew not the importance of my words, of my actions, of my behaviors.

Or maybe I did.

And maybe I just didn't care.

I was an uneducated fool.

Often, I still am.

I did things that I regret, things that I would rather let die than admit to you here, things that I would rather erase forever from existence, things that I am saddened to know I once did, but things that I must admit.

Among many of my flaws, of which are countless:

I used to say the N-word. Regularly. Casually. I told myself it was okay because I always used a soft "a" and said it only in endearing ways, like 'What up my...'

•••

WHERE I COME from words are said to never hurt, only rocks, but it took leaving home for me to learn that isn't true. Words hurt like hell. I have had more words slung in my direction than rocks. If I multiplied the number of rocks thrown at me by 100, it still wouldn't surpass the number of words that have hit me over the head, knocked me out cold, left me sick in bed for days at a time; contemplating horrible, horrible things.

Yet, looking back at my past through Internet browsers, I see that I once flung words of my own that were much heavier than any word that could have ever been thrown at me. I threw them around casually, aimlessly, recklessly, and in all directions.

The divots from these words exist all over my past.

Divots that I caused.

The N-word wasn't the only word that I let slip into my casual vocabulary.

There were others.

Many others.

But I've grown since those days.

I've changed.

I've learned.

I've evolved.

But so what?

I still threw those damn rocks.

Craters don't go away just because the meteor says, "Where I come from..."

They don't go away because the meteor was only the second, third, fourth, or fifth to fall.

They don't go away just because the meteor has changed, learned, evolved.

They don't go away...

•••

IF I AM only the fifth friend to jump off the cliff, to tag along, to say the N-word, am I still as culpable as the first one to jump?

Is my tongue still responsible?

Is it possible for me to be forgiven, or are these actions forever a definitive part of who I am as a person?

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I WRITE THIS confession because I think it is important.

One: I think it is important to show and admit that I am a flawed man with a flawed past. I am undeserving of flinging the rocks that I have flung throughout this book, for I live in a

glass house and upon the throwing of the rocks my house is the first to shatter. I am not a man without sin. I am, instead, a man overflowing with paradoxes, flawed logic, hypocrisy, impure thoughts, and so on—as are all of us. None of us are absolved from the issues of America, of this world, of humanity; but just because we are flawed doesn't mean we cannot strive to be better, to do better, to learn how to make ourselves and our country and our countrymen better.

Two: I believe people are capable of change, and I believe that we should let and encourage them to do so. We should allow them the opportunity to evolve. We all grew up in different environments with different influences and different understandings of the world, and so on. We need to make it okay to change, to evolve, to get better, to be better, to do better. We cannot be so quick to exile, to imprison someone within their past.

Three: You are not your past, you are your present and what you strive to do with your future. Past mistakes don't define you, unless you continue to make that same mistake over and over again, unless you stifle your own evolution, unless you remain complacent with the choices you have made, unless you refuse to get better. We must all be open to new information, to new ways of thinking, to evolving as people.

Only then can we evolve as a nation.

Only then can we defeat AMERICA-20.

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I AM A flawed man.

I have said horrible things, done horrible things, and been complicit in horrible things.

I am a sinner.

I have oppressed.

I have made racist jokes, I have believed in unfounded stereotypes, I have said the N-word, but I am actively working against my biases—biases that still exist inside of me, biases I will likely never fully rid my subconscious of.

But I will be more conscious of my words, of my actions, and of their aftermath.

I will work to educate myself.

I will work to be better.

I will work to do better.

I will work...

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AND WE SHOULD let everyone else do the same.

We should encourage growth.

We should encourage change.

We should encourage evolution.

We should not judge someone based on only their past.

We should judge them instead by their growth, by their desire to change, by their hunger for evolution.

AMERICA-20 is in all of us.

And we must unite if we ever want to rid our nation of this deadly, deadly disease.

We must unite if we want to save this country.

## *Acknowledgments*

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Each name represents a black American whose life was unjustly taken because of the color of their skin. This list is far from comprehensive, for there are countless more who we may never know the names of. The number of lives lost to racism in the United States of America will likely never be known by anyone other than God.

But God knows.

God sees.

And God will not forget what we—the United States of America—have done, and continue to do, to the children of God.

## *Author's Note*

The journey to a perfect world is ever-lasting. And it is each generation's duty and obligation to move humanity further down the road to the utopia our souls desire, and it is our responsibility to teach our children to continue the journey when we are gone.

The revolution is always happening.

The sins of humanity remain loud and we must continuously fight against the demons they create.

So, let's get to work.