



Trying Times

Peter Leonard

These are the times which test the heart. Our country is facing many evils. From civil unrest of unique proportions with motivations that confuse many, to a virus that has revealed, as the removal of moss which uncloaks rotting wood, the divisions that our country has been subject to. These divisions go to the depths of human motivation, and they show clearly that some Americans now profess the tenets of humanism and its consequences for

governance, while many still hold on to the overriding will of Providence and the desire for freedom over security, that government should be but a referee, and not a player—an enforcer of justice, not outcome. As a 20-year-old, I was born shortly before one of our greatest national tragedies, 9/11, and reached adolescence during the 2008 financial crises and Great Recession. Now, on the verge of adulthood, I see throughout the country the effects of COVID-19 upon

our health, our government, and the souls of the American people. These can be scary times. They have forced me to seriously consider my future and my role as an adult American in our local and national politics. I have had to come to grips with the nature of life on this planet, realizing now that, as General MacArthur once said, “There is no security on this earth, only opportunity.”

At first glance, and rightly so, the future may seem bleak. There are whispers about the growing movement of neo-Marxism and “democratic” socialism in the country—philosophies that affirm values contrary to the principles of the Founders. Far Left Progressives, motivated by the central idea of humanism, deny even the idea of God, thereby debasing the entire system of government which we possess—the affirmation that our rights are Creator-endowed. This creates a landscape for a more general and confrontational push for the economic system of socialism and the equal sharing of misery and, inevitably, the even greater expansion of a national government that will, as it always has, lead to the continued degradation of individual and state rights.

I see the scenario of liberty versus the false promise of security playing out in the COVID response. There is the ongoing debate of mask mandates and whether they are efficient in preventing the spread of the virus. It seems that government, before empirical evidence of efficacy, quickly issued rules governing personal conduct regardless of the circumstances, health implications on individuals, or the wishes of private citizens and businesses. At the outset of the pandemic, businesses were unilaterally shut

down, forcing literally millions out of work and many into poverty and unemployment. The Federal government, out of thin air, then produced trillions of dollars in relief for businesses and individuals, expanding our collective dependence on DC, and further borrowing from my future. Already more than \$21 trillion in debt, two or three trillion more seemed a pittance.

Many local governments, disregarding any trust in individuals to take care of themselves, even issued *curfews* at the start of the pandemic. Like wielding a chainsaw when a scalpel was needed, government responded to a legitimate emergency by curtailing the rights of the people.

The events that have occurred over the last several months have proven confusing and frustrating. In many ways, I have been disappointed by my government and by my fellow citizens, and I think we all feel this way for different reasons. In particular, the virus has exposed our minds and motivations, and we must now find a way forward.

Processing this new environment has been challenging. Forced from the comfortable illusion of security, I now understand that the world in which we live can quickly be thrown into total confusion bordering on chaos. Accepting this, the in-fighting, and the turmoil, I have come to develop my own perspectives that I fall back onto when the pressures of the world start to close in, and the future seems to have little hope. I recall certain figures in history who exemplified the qualities that see people through even the most terrifying realities of human existence—qualities like courage, integrity, and bravery.

We must always remember that the future has always looked bleak to those who are living in the present. I look to George Washington, the man who held the cause of our founding together, and the agony of the defeats he endured at the hands of the British Empire. With his rag-tag group of colonist soldiers, the future seemed always to be balanced on the edge of a razor. The Union cause in the Civil War was darkened by numerous defeats at the hand of General Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia. Until General Grant took command of Union forces, securing the western theatre, victory for the Republic must have seemed to be a hopeful dream. When American marines, in flat-bottom boats, bounced through the waters of the English Channel approaching certain death, charged through air hazy with bullets, climbed the bluffs of Normandy, and began the invasion of France, their victory against fascism must have seemed a long way off.

Throughout the storms of history, each individual--not just those who have risen to the heights of authority--mustered the moral courage to endure and succeed. Even when the future seemed its most bleak, courageous men and women throughout our history accepted the hand they were dealt, did the best they could with what they had, and persevered. Our Republic has endured tragedies, disasters, and wars, yet we have consistently strived for a better tomorrow. We persevere, not because we have always been united under one cause—after all, only three percent of colonists fought the British, and the Civil War was fought by countrymen against

countrymen—but because certain men and women, despite their circumstances, despite their misfortune, have struggled onward, seeking excellence and service in all that they did. They prepared themselves, sometimes without knowing, for the future service to which they were called. Ulysses Grant never knew that he would go from commanding a regiment to commanding the entire Union Army. George Washington and his militia were perpetually on the verge of defeat but they stuck it out, they fought bitterly, and they never gave in.

To my generation, to those who are likeminded, I say this: we must possess that same mindset. We must hold the truths that are self-evident in our hearts, even when everyone else says that they are antiquated; we must keep the wise words of our Founding Fathers alive in our hearts, even when they are decried for their faults; we must maintain in our actions and aspirations the American Dream because one day, in a year, five years, or 25, we may be called to service. If we are not discouraged, if we are not beaten down, if we look forward with strength, if we strive onward with courage, we will be prepared to serve our nation—a cause greater than ourselves. These trying times are a classroom, they are a knocking on the door, a warning that we must heed. Our hearts are being tested, and we must not let ourselves be broken. We must become stronger.

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