

Enduring Together

You deserve to rest.

You have been through hell. You have seen your faith in your country battered and shattered in the face of fresh waves of police brutality, and in the apathy and selfishness of your countrymen. You have seen your loved ones suffer because of the greed, negligence, and outright malice of the Trump administration. And you have lived with dread every moment since November of 2016: that this is not merely a dark chapter in your life, but the prologue to a much darker story.

You deserve to rest. You have been through hell. You have not been fighting alone. Millions upon millions of people have fought alongside you, whether you knew it or not. Millions upon millions of people are fighting, in ways both big and small, to keep the worst nightmares from our door, to repair the damage of the last battles, and to build a nation (and a world) that need never face this kind of dread again.

You deserve to rest. You, and all your comrades. Every protester who marched in the streets for black lives; everyone who sacrificed family holidays to blunt the spread of COVID-19 across the country; every teacher, educator, and childcare worker who struggled to give kids a sense of normalcy in the face of terrible uncertainty; every healthcare worker fighting in the face of terrible odds to save every life that can be saved; everyone who lent a listening ear or a kind word to a friend or family member in need. You have gone above and beyond the call, time and time again.

You deserve to rest. But if you're like me, you can't rest. If you're like me, your instincts are blaring warnings at you. You feel a constant sense of danger you can't escape from, a paranoid awareness of the world around you as you search for threats to you and those you care about.

You deserve to rest, and you can't. Donald Trump may be a lame duck president, but he is still president, and the dangers (both active and passive) his presidency has always posed are still threats to you and to your way of life. A vaccine is on the way, but it is not here yet, and in the face of the outright abdication of responsibility by the institutions that are supposed to protect us, it will arrive only in the aftermath of a catastrophic pandemic.

You deserve to rest. You have lived most of your life in Earth's most powerful and prosperous nation at a time when our species has never been safer or more secure from War, Famine, Pestilence, and Death, only to watch your fellow human beings—your fellow countrymen—fling the doors wide to welcome those nightmares back into our midst. It will take time to reckon with the cost of having those old Horses stampeding among us once again; it will take time to reckon with the indifference, the

apathy, and the malice that made these tragedies possible. When you think of all that you and those you love have suffered through, you feel your weariness down to your bones. You have gone through so much, and there is still so much more to be done.

You deserve to rest, and you are not alone. You and your comrades have been fighting this war for a long time now. Maybe you were a staunch, small government conservative, who did not grasp the true threat Trump posed until you saw how he failed to handle the COVID pandemic, and let this new pestilence burn through America like a slow fire. Maybe your fear started before that: for you, COVID was not a revelation, only the latest in a long list of abhorrences; from his rank corruption and incompetence, to his gleeful rotting of the government's best functions, to his constant spiteful malice towards immigrants seeking the lamp beside the golden door, to every cruel, xenophobic word from his smug, venial lips. For you, the fear was with you the moment Trump became a contender for the presidency, and sharpened into terror when he seized it.

For some of you, this fear is much older. Whether because of your race, your gender, your religion, your beliefs, your sexuality, or any of the ten thousand reasons America can castigate you, dismiss you, or diminish you, you had no illusions as to the darkness that festers inside this country. To you, Trump, however abhorrent he may be, is nothing new: just the latest marshal of the army of nightmares that have always marched across the American Experiment.

This army is uniquely American—it whetted its teeth on the tribes of human beings who lived here before European colonizers arrived on its shore, and built its strength on a system of abominable subjugation that denied human beings their basic rights for no other reason than the color of their skin. The history of our country is written in its victories and its defeats; it has been bested many times, but it always endures, and survives, and claws its way back to power.

This army is uniquely American, but it is also part of a much older tradition, spread to the far corners of human civilization. It was with us in Uruk, in Assyria, in Israel, in Babylon: it lurked among the Egyptians, and marauded across the great kingdoms of Ghana and Zimbabwe: it festered in Thebes, in Sparta, in Athens, in Persia, in Rome. It is an ancient fear: fear of the "other", and what they might take from us, and what we must take from them first, to save ourselves. And when alloyed with a powerful empire, this dismal tradition is one of the most terrible forces on Earth.

We have been fighting a war against this army, and all the armies like it, for a long time. If it is less open and pervasive than it once was, it is no less insidious, and so less seductive. Too many people hear its lure, both within our nation, and without. In the face of this ancient demon, and the power it still holds over us, it is easy to feel yourself daunted and overwhelmed. Easy to wonder what the point in fighting is.

But then you remember; you are not fighting alone. The history of mankind is written in the struggling of human beings just like you, trying to make sense of our world, to corral the Horsemen and drive them from our house, to leave the world a better place than it was when we were born into it. Generations upon generations of human beings on every continent in every nation have fought this war before you: billions of your comrades are fighting this war now.

In India, 250 million people participated in a general strike, and are marching on New Delhi to demand their government support and protect them

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_general_strike_of_2020). In Guatemala, protesters are demonstrating against a government that slashes funds to fight malnutrition while increasing their own expense accounts (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Guatemalan_protests). And in America, millions spent their summer protesting, donating, and demonstrating against police abuse, and 80 million Americans looked at Trump and all he represents and chose to pry him from the reins of power.

There is an old cliché: it is always darkest before the dawn. The last four years have been an especially long, especially miserable night. Now the night is nearly over. The end of the Trump administration is in sight: the end of COVID-19's hold on your life is in sight; the end of this terrible, omnipresent dread is in sight. But all those things require enduring through this last, deepest darkness, and making it to the dawn.

Like the darkest moments of the night, there is nothing you can do to make the morning come faster. The turning of the earth is beyond your control. But you are not powerless. You can welcome strangers fleeing through the night; you can raise bonfires and blazing torches up into the dark; you can feast and laugh and be merry, even through the fear; you can soldier out to face what terrors may be faced; you can tell stories of how generations past faced their own deep darknesses, and endured.

That is our task now: to endure. The enemies we face, and the terror that comes with them, are ancient. But so is the struggle against them. Human beings of every kind and creed in every era have had to face these moments, when the dread is at its deepest, and our exhaustion nears its peak. Enduring is never easy. But it is easier when you know you're not doing it alone.

You deserve to rest. I am sorry you cannot do it yet. But I promise, the dawn is coming. A moment when you can lay down your burden for a little while, and put your mind at ease. You are not alone in your struggle. You are not alone in your weariness. You are standing shoulder to shoulder with the best humanity has offered, across its long generations.

You deserve to rest. You will get your chance. And whether you are soldiering through the night, or

laying your head down to sleep, or even looking out at the grey horizon and wondering where to go from here, I can only promise that you will not be alone.

We go forward, together, ever and always.