

The Antithesis of America

I don't think that I identify as an American. I was born here and have my little social security number, but it never felt like I belonged here. I remember being in high school and not wanting to say the Pledge of Allegiance or stand for the national anthem. I was not protesting or wanting to stir up any controversy; it just started to weigh heavily on me. I questioned why I was pledging in unison with others for words that I felt didn't even apply to me. The last time I said the Pledge of Allegiance was at my high school graduation, where I emphasized "with liberty and justice for all" with every breath. That was my final move as Senior Class President as the Black Lives Matter Movement was in full swing.

The more I learned about the history of this nation, my place in it started to become apparent. My ancestors were not seen as human beings but as invisible shadows that were only meant for labor and curbing their sexual appetites. I have known this state was corrupt since I was eight years old when I first learned about Malcolm X, and this birthed my rebellious spirit. I am not a rebel by nature; rules are necessary, but only rules rooted in the collective and intentional uplifting of others.

In my twenty-five years, I have been slapped in the face by the nation's deception on many occurrences. Not menial things, but knowledge that took my breath away and brought my soul to its knees. I was shaken when I discovered that Martin Luther King was socially exiled for being anti-war or that Susan B. Anthony was racist towards Black men because of the 15th Amendment. Or that Fannie Lou Hamer was sterilized without her consent or when I saw the lifeless body of Trayvon Martin. These and other marks have never left my psyche. These were not just snapshots of my education but moments leading up to a giant revelation rooted in hypocrisy. When I got into community work, I started and remain on the radical side of things. I believe in revolution over the band-aid method of reform, womanism over feminism, which is rooted in whiteness, and collective liberation over generational assimilation. The concepts of radical dissent are what have driven and sustained me. However, I realize that these are not derived from American values but their antithesis.

While I understand the foundational principles of the nation, you have to look at who built it. This nation was founded by white men who were audacious enough to say that "all men are created equal" but defined their status on the number of enslaved people they had. The same place that made the lynchings of Black bodies public gatherings with handwritten boastful postcards but now wants to hide behind it to keep their grandparents from looking bad. A place that was born out of religious freedom but has depicted Muslims and their religion as destructive for as long as I can recall. Or the same place where people try to idolize free speech but exiled Paul Robeson for clocking the genocide that Black people experienced in this country. Between the deliberate assassination organizers, the Tuskegee Experiment, or the sweeping incarceration for prison labor while there is a whole thirteenth amendment is really beyond me.

These examples just contribute to the notion that this country does not want to live up to its expectations of being a free and democratic society. I believe that the nation has never wanted

anyone who was not a white, heterosexual, able-bodied, or rich man to prosper in any fashion. Many groups that have been marginalized have not been offered their civil rights but instead have had to demand them. No one has been liberated because it was the moral choice to make, but instead, it is only allowed in their terms, and white people can benefit from it in some capacity. I understand that this view is radical but can be validated with numerous historical occurrences of when disenfranchised thought they would be a part of the democratic process and were challenged or deceived.

While pondering on these ideas, it has caused me to form the generalization that I do not want to associate myself with America. And I do not mean this from a practical citizenship viewpoint of a physical association, but a moral association. I want to be everything that America isn't and serve as an emancipator from oppression instead of striving to be equal to the oppressor. As an organizer, I cannot align my being to all that hurts this nation, regardless of whether it would enhance my benefit. I am here for the dissent and to stand for every value that this stolen land does not want to uphold.

For this to become a reality, one must ponder what this society's antithesis would look like. I can think of a few concepts. One thing that comes to mind is every single line of Dr. King's "I Have A Dream" speech, but it still feels like a dream that we are far away from. I also think about something like the ten-point platform for the Black Panther Party in which they advocated for needs that any citizen should have already been granted. The opposite of America is what I think every organizer dreams to see in their lifetime. They want to see a world that puts quality of life over quantity of goods, or puts people over profit, or accountability for its citizens for the security of a political seat.

Nevertheless, there can be differing views on what the opposite of this country could potentially be. It could be a place where every moral is upheld, or any dissent is met with punishment. The opposite could be the ability to produce a state where there are no rules altogether and everyone is free to make their own choices, or a state where there are rules that everyone must follow out of fear of consequence. Either way, America is not currently on either side of this spectrum.

As for myself, when I think about where we are headed as a people, I stray farther and farther away from American values because they are simply dishonest. They are fallacies, misconceptions, and half-truths, which I do not want to stand for, not in my personal life, not in my professional career, or any future spaces. I honor myself and my ancestors by remaining true to my morals. Sometimes, I wonder whether the nation knows the extent of its delusions and how they have affected generations. I wonder if they question how many people have died by their hands but how many chose to believe in the lie. Not only that but how long will it continue? Before starting the Selma to Montgomery March Dr. King said that "no lie can live forever." Good has to be restored one day; even if it is on a day I do not live to lay my eyes on, someone will benefit from it. The question remains if America wants to preserve itself in its current state or if it desires to become the nation that is true to its principles of freedom, democracy, and liberty for all people regardless of social identities.

This nation may also need to burn so something new can be born. An alternative needs to be created for people to live and not survive. Regardless of how that may come, it is imperative that

the state cannot sustain under these conditions. Whether by government overhaul or through revolution by the people, this country is not in a position to prosper with this continued oppression. But I would say...let it burn. Hopefully out of that, it would bear a new America that has adopted either the fundamentals of the Constitution or built a new foundation entirely that values the people. And then maybe I could potentially align myself with that.