

Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation

By John Lewis

While my time here has now come to an end, I want you to know that in the last days and hours of my life you inspired me. You filled me with hope about the next chapter of the great American story when you used your power to make a difference in our society. Millions of people motivated simply by human compassion laid down the burdens of division. Around the country and the world you set aside race, class, age, language and nationality to demand respect for human dignity.

That is why I had to visit Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, though I was admitted to the hospital the following day. I just had to see and feel it for myself that, after many years of silent witness, the truth is still marching on.

Though I am gone, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe.

Emmett Till was my George Floyd. He was my Rayshard Brooks, Sandra Bland and Breonna Taylor. He was 14 when he was killed, and I was only 15 years old at the time. I will never ever forget the moment when it became so clear that he could easily have been me. In those days, fear constrained us like an imaginary prison, and troubling thoughts of potential brutality committed for no understandable reason were the bars.

Though I was surrounded by two loving parents, plenty of brothers, sisters and cousins, their love could not protect me from the unholy oppression waiting just outside that family circle. Unchecked, unrestrained violence and government-sanctioned terror had the power to turn a simple stroll to the store for some Skittles or an innocent morning jog down a lonesome country road into a nightmare.

By John Heid

People say to me, oh you gotta be crazy to dream in times like these. / Don't you read the news? Don't you know the score? / How can you dream when so many others grieve? / By way of a reply I say a fool such as I sees a dream as somewhere to begin.

—Sara Thomsen, "Somewhere To Begin"

I woke to these lyrics this past Hiroshima morning, the 75th anniversary. Covid's in the air. Asylum's on the rocks. Western mountains are on fire. So too, urban streets. The US-Mexico border wall is rising at warp speed. All this, and then comes Sara Thomsen's lyrical query: "How can I dream when so many others grieve?" And yet, here I am, dreaming.

The times seem grim, grisly, inside the DC beltway and all across the country. More than a vaccine is needed for healing; more than a changing of the guard in the Oval Office for authentic transformation. We didn't get to where we are as a nation, let alone a species, overnight. This is no time for cheap hope. Our state of affairs cannot, will not, be remedied from the center. Absolute power, by definition, never concedes willingly. If we want to survive, let alone thrive, it is time, long overdue, to listen to the voices that have been marginalized, the visionaries among us on the fringes.

Nukewatch Quarterly - 8



Photo by Pouya Dianat.

The lessons are there for the learning.

We face an uncertain future. We have reasons to be afraid.

But as I was reminded in Memphis, we've faced far worse before.

We have a manual for resistance. We have models of courage and clarity. We have the playbook.

I say to the young people, the young protesters, and those not so young: Accept a way of peace, believe in the way of love, believe in the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence.

—John Lewis, 1940-2020, *Freedom Rider*, December 2016.

If we are to survive as one unified nation, we must discover what so readily takes root in our hearts that could rob Mother Emanuel Church in South Carolina of her brightest and best, shoot unwitting concert-goers in Las Vegas and choke to death the hopes and dreams of a gifted violinist like Elijah McClain.

Like so many young people today, I was searching for a way out, or some might say a way in, and then I heard the voice of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on an old radio. He was talking about the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence. He said we are all complicit when we tolerate injustice. He said it is not enough to say it will get better by and by. He said each of us has a moral obligation to stand up, speak up and speak out. When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something. Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what

Uprising, Not Insurrection

Perhaps we can only hear them when our backs are up against the wall—a wall of our own creation. Tohono O'odham poet Ophelia Zepeda writes: "Tagging is a scream at midnight audible at dawn." Can we hear it? Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "A riot is the language of the unheard." Are we able to recognize it?

Theodore Roethke wrote, "In a dark time the eye begins to see." Some look around and see only darkness, while others, a shaft of light. Some look at the streets and see insurrection, others, uprising. We see from where we stand, or kneel, or lie. What will rise from the ashes of the tens of thousands of acres of burned mountain forests and from our city streets? Yes, fire destroys. It also purifies and illuminates, making way for something altogether new. Be warned, status quo of patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, capitalism: resurrection is threatening. The writing's been on the wall long enough. The midnight scream is being heard—at last.

No, we won't find a retaining wall to hold up our state of affairs crumbling under the weight of the dominant power structure.

Its safety nets have large holes. As Audre Lourde so prophetically and plainly said: "The master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house." Those are the tools that built it after all. They are designed

to preserve it. Neither ballot nor bomb, atomic or conventional, will get us any closer to an egalitarian society. These are the master's tools. It is only we, the people, altogether, the grassroots, who have the construction tools, let alone the vision, to build something authentically new in the shell of the old. Dorothy Day nailed it when she said we need "a revolution of heart."

And what will this revolution look like one asks? No one person can say. A communal response is essential. Cornell West says "Justice is what love looks like in public." Love with hands and feet. Clearly, there are no quick fixes. No bumper sticker solutions. Transformation, like evolution, is a process.

Only by listening to the long silenced voices at the margins, do I believe that I, as part of the privileged center, can begin to see a way. I imagine it involves cooperation, power-sharing, non-nuclear in family and weapon. A world turned upside down, as the Diggers said. No wonder Gandhi called such efforts "experiments in truth." Rejecting alternatives to our current so-called way of living means ultimately... annihilation, extinction. Perhaps that is this pandemic's most critical message. I believe together we can do it. "You may call me a dreamer, but I'm not the only one..."

—John Heid is a humanitarian aid activist in Tucson.

we called the Beloved Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself.

Ordinary people with extraordinary vision can redeem the soul of America by getting in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble. Voting and participating in the democratic process are key. The vote is the most powerful nonviolent change agent you have in a democratic society. You must use it because it is not guaranteed. You can lose it.

You must also study and learn the lessons of history because humanity has been involved in this soul-wrenching, existential struggle for a very long time. People on every continent have stood in your shoes, through decades and centuries before you. The truth does not change, and that is why the answers worked out long ago can help you find solutions to the challenges of our time. Continue to build union between movements stretching across the globe because we must put away our willingness to profit from the exploitation of others.