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## The Legacy of one “Great” Nation

### Prelude:



Every journey begins with an idea. Space and time are two concepts we humans don't fully comprehend. We often look up into the sky during a clear night and see tiny little white lights emitting from the darkness. Some are suns and moons, while others are planets. These celestial bodies are larger than life and have the ability to make an individual feel small. As we embark on a new journey, I will serve as the guide. This expedition is one filled with various beliefs, thoughts, perception, and tones. I will provide the knowledge and offer an extensive amount of content. I am not one to tell you like it is, rather I aim to tell you what happened. History tells us the past, opening up the gateways to challenge the future and present.

“Legacy, a word that has been in my head throughout my entire life”. This sentence, my own, was the first I wrote as I embarked on this 20th Century Writers journey and my keen interest on exposing the truth behind the American problem. Before I dive into the topic of legacy, I want to provide background on myself. I am about to end my college journey as I graduate tomorrow; May 20, 2020. But where will I graduate? At home in front of a computer

screen surrounded by my fellow quarantined parents and dog? I am not happy about that, but at this point it has become inevitable. I would love to express my disappointments with NYU, but even this situation is out of leadership's control. I don't believe I am living in the wrong period in history, rather, I am just living. Whether a virus or some sort of foreign terror exists, I am very much looking forward to entering into a new chapter of my life when things get back to normal. With that said, the world has changed, as it does each and every day. In order to evolve we must revisit our past, analyzing and studying those before us. Questions like, "How were people governed?", "What does power mean to the past?", or "Has equality ever truly existed?", all attribute to our future and what lies ahead. I know I am very excited to see where my path will lead. I believe it is best to set a course that has the ability to change because it is impossible to predict the future, only those with an open mind and the willingness to educate ourselves on the faults of human history will be able to handle everything and anything life throws at them.

To provide some more background on myself as an individual thinker, I made it clear at the beginning of this course that I am a very gen-z reader. This means that I read articles every day; mostly online. I am a subscriber to countless forums and magazines that inform me and keep me up to date with news all over the world. I read political, sport, fashion, music, and cultural pieces that are very interesting and carried out through the power and popularity of both celebrities and "important" people throughout the world. I have found that my choice of conducted reading has been very beneficial in regards to staying up to date with the virus, however it has slowly become a bore. The repetition of news cycles constantly remind me that we are living in a loop. Our lives are very limited and it is become increasingly harder to accept this fate that has bestowed all of us. As an athlete, I am all too familiar with the power of repetition, but in this case, hearing about the virus all day and everyday has made me hate our

situation even more. I know that it's dangerous and we all need to be cautious as a worldly body. The reason why the media has become so repetitive is because of the ignorance of humanity. We like to think we are invincible in the sense that "I won't get hit by a car" or "I won't catch the virus and die because I'm young and healthy". If it wasn't for people with that sort of unwitting mindset, the world would be much better off. I will come back to this sort of mindset because it attributes to numerous facets of the human existence, but before I do so I would like to finish my background and introduction.

Although I feel like I read a lot, I rarely read books. Yet, I do not hate books, I just haven't found the right ones to read. Maybe that's out of laziness and my inability to search for them. Fortunately, I have found inspiration from acclaimed authors like James Baldwin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Jesmyn Ward, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Joseph Conrad, Chinua Achebe, Mario Vargas Llosa, Thomas Mann, Nawal el Saadawi, Gao Xingjian, Jean-Paul Sartre, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Franz Kafka, Abel Meeropol, Michael S. Harper, and Melvin Dixon. Their stories have enabled me to conjure an unrelenting passion for not only analyzing their respective works, but using their opinions to feed into my own voice.

## **Chapter 1: "The Nigger, The Fag & The Bitch"**



For one, I really found a connection with Coates' *Between the World and Me*. Like I said, I'm not the biggest fan of reading books, but this was a story that I genuinely enjoyed. A story about a father and his son and the journey of life reminded me a lot of my childhood. I've lived my life around various individuals from numerous backgrounds. I've had friends from pretty much every ethnic, religious, political, and racial group there is. I hold no prejudice against anybody and have found that I can get along with any type of individual. I love the idea of diversity and that's one of the reasons why I love New York so much. When it comes to Coates, he explains how it is to grow up in an urban neighborhood in Baltimore. Just based off my knowledge on cities in America, I know Baltimore has a very high rate of crimes and poverty. Coates explanation took me back to my time in Middle School. I really don't have a race that I identify with. This is attributed to the fact that I am mixed with a lot of different backgrounds and genetic traits from Eastern Europe to Africa and even Mexico. Continually, depending on the time of year or place I'm living in I can look like a Hispanic in summer or in Los Angeles due to my dark tan, or like a Caucasian in winter or in New York when my color goes away. In middle school I was surrounded by mostly Hispanic and black kids. Prior to my middle school years, I

had been at a school with mostly white kids in a very progressive and “hipster” community. Middle school saw a drastic change in regards to everything from my peers to the environment I was indulged in. I learned and saw things that a kid my age should have been protected from. Whether it was marijuana at my friends’ fathers house or one of my classmates sleeping at school because he had no home to go to. Although this was a shock at first to me, it was a normalcy for most of the kids in my school. I was a minority in my own right, but quickly earned the respect and friendship from most kids, especially since the class sizes were small in numbers. Just as Coates used his academic prowess to create a future for himself at the University of Howard, I too used my knowledge and education to thrust my life forward towards NYU.

One of the more intriguing quotes I found was, “Black people love their children with a kind of obsession. You are all we have, and you come to us endangered.” (Coates). This was very relatable because a lot of my black friends in middle school had all the intelligence and drive to succeed like any privileged white individual had. I realized that coming from a very supporting and loving family can only do so much. When it came time to go to high school and even college, I saw that many lower income minorities did not receive the opportunities I believe they should have. It didn’t matter if they were academically sound or accomplished, they still lacked one thing; history. When I mean by history, I want to start by explaining the factor of parents. Relating to the idea of parents love, as Coates describes as unrelenting and passionate, in reality, the love a black child receives in society isn’t enough to keep them out of trouble and misfortune. Numerous misfortunes arise with the reality of facing the inability to afford a prestigious school. Regardless of this situation, I have seen and been inspired by those that seek to endure these misfortunes as they strive to receive the best education they can in order to support their parents. People with this mindset capture the ability of leadership and assertiveness

that propels them to becoming the first college graduate in their families. On the other hand, and without this mindset, we often see the hopeless route take place. Without family, people tend to suffer from an empty hole that exists deep within their souls. As they seek to find a proper sense of belonging, they often suffer from the downfall of the “endangered” black man in America. Today, gangs like the Crips, one of the more well-known factions in all of American gang life use lost souls to fill their needs of criminality and violence. A mother’s love is not enough to protect those from the flawed system we live in today. Unfortunately, many are stuck in a life of crime, only able to get out through death; a situation too common in the modern American society.

Touching on the idea of diversity once more, Coates is a master wordsmith in his quote, “Hate gives identity. The nigger, the fag, the bitch illuminate the border, illuminate what we ostensibly are not, illuminate the Dream of being white, of being a Man. We name the hated strangers and are thus confirmed in the tribe.” (Coates). Here, Coates perfectly identifies the main issue of racism, sexism, and all the negative belief systems in society. Hate is a powerful word and one that can consume any individual. “The Nigger, the fag, the bitch”, become the three focused minorities as they reflect the hardship all three have suffered from throughout the history of America. Whether it was the issue of equal racial rights, women’s place in society, or the segregated LGBTQ community, hate has always been the backbone of each topic. Coates believes this issue continues to be established because of the idea that it is good to be white; a white man in particular. It can be due to an abundance of factors, but this idea still exists because of religion and how society was originally created, “Under God” and by white men. These white men “Under God” are the top tribe in America. They are able to use hate to empower people to stand against minorities and change. Also known to some as the 1%, they rule over tribes of

Hispanics, blacks, less fortunate whites, and the LGBTQ community that continue to struggle every day as they embark on a twisted and distasteful journey to find equality. The world isn't black and white, but Coates alludes to the idea that he believes it is in his quote. I believe with the power of progression and change, these issues can be solved and hopefully we can live in a more peaceful and harmonious world, one where someone like Samori's (the central character in this piece) friend Prince doesn't get innocently shot and killed for being racially profiled in the wrong place at the wrong time.

## **Chapter 2: Black & White**



When equality is achieved, the world shall find peace. Coates alludes to the awareness of achieving peace in society, but instead offers how one can protect themselves from violence and hardship. We live in a society that has been methodically torn apart. In particular, for America, racism, sexism, and really every negative “ism” has contributed towards a divide that not only effects individual's daily lives, but goes as far as the White House. I would like to stay away from politics, but author James Baldwin writes in a way that alludes to the white leadership in America by saying “countrymen”. Before I dive into that topic, I'd like to reiterate Baldwin's

view regarding the lack of opportunities black people in particular suffer from, alluded to in his story *The Fire Next Time*. The systematic oppression that exists, and always has existed continues to make it difficult for any progress to ensue. From the countless minorities suffering from poverty, lack of education, and even death, I believe the only way to truly change the landscape of America is to start from the top. In other words, racism, for example, can't be fixed overnight. For the most part, the hatred racism summons is engrained in the DNA of individuals who have kept "the tradition" alive for countless generations. One man's words and opinions cannot change that fact no matter how convincing they are. People like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. may disagree with this statement, but both Baldwin and Coates bring this issue to the attention of their audiences in very similar ways that prove the value of togetherness.

Referring back to Coates quote, "Black people love their children with a kind of obsession. You are all we have, and you come to us endangered." (Coates). To reiterate my thoughts on this quote, we can simply look at impoverished places in America. For the most part, people live in these areas because of the lack of opportunities society has given them. For black people, they suffer from the highest poverty rates in America. The youth that live within these areas find themselves engaged in a life of crime, violence, and hardship. They did not choose to be in this environment, but like the traditional racists in America, they were born into it.

When I was reading Baldwin's letter to his nephew, I felt a sense of compassion and overwhelming truth. In it, he goes through the realities of a black man in America. He explains to his nephew that the word "innocence" does not apply to the color of your skin. There is an existing view that black people are lesser than, and are a threat to everyday life and the longevity of America. Now, I think that is absolutely ridiculous and a shameful belief that still resonates with a multitude of individuals in this country. From my view, I think that thought should be a



crime, and is one of the reasons why America continues to find itself in a stalemate of division that suffers from not only beliefs like this, but the continuity of negative “isms” that get passed along from generation to generation. One passage that stood out to me and embodies this thought was, “This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish.” (Baldwin). Here, Baldwin tries to articulate his thoughts on the realities his nephew will face for his entire life because he is black. It is clear that “this innocent country” is meant to be sarcastic, however from the white man’s perspective, in this case, they truly believe their actions are justified. This quote attributes to the point I mentioned earlier, in that black people are born into, and displaced into segregated environments by our “countrymen” that have all the intentions and knowledge of making sure they do not succeed or have any opportunities to prosper. This sadistic and cyclical “program” has existed and I believe will continue to exist for a long time.

In relation to Coates, Baldwin pushes his ideas to another level. No matter how hard a black man tries to explain to a white man the suffering he endures, they will never understand. We can only try to feel what Baldwin lives from an outside perspective. I see no reason to deny Baldwin’s claims and thoughts, because he has no reason to lie about the life he lives. This brings me to another issue; the denial of the “countrymen”. In order to protect one’s self, there comes a time where you have the choice to deny wrongdoings. Instead of being honest and choosing to suffer the consequences, an individual or group can do everything in their power to change the narrative. However, people like Coates’ and Baldwin who choose to speak up against narrative changers, serve as the shining light in the darkness of evil. In my view, Coates operates with more compassion, while Baldwin uses tough love and direct honesty to prove a point. I

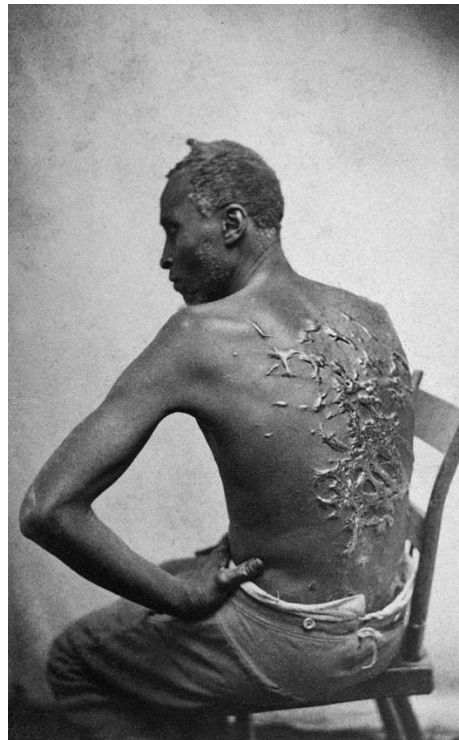
believe both methods work and get across a similar message. At the end of the day they both want to protect and educate their brethren and blood.

To continue the specificity of my thoughts, for Baldwin, he believes love can serve as fuel to the fire that will allow black people to ascend in society. My favorite quote from his letter is used to describe the fear and compromised conscience that exists within white people. In it he says, “You must accept them and accept them with love, for these innocent people have no other hope. They are in effect still trapped in a history which they do not understand and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it. They have had to believe for many years, and for innumerable reasons, that black men are inferior to white men.” (Baldwin). Since there is a lot to touch on within this passage, I want to first point out how similar it is to Coates' explanation of this same topic when he points out the act of living as a black man where we, “illuminate what we ostensibly are not, illuminate the Dream of being white, of being a Man.” (Coates). Here, he explains that being black is less than a man and the only way to achieve equality is by being white. This attributes to Baldwin's explanation of the entrapped history that overwhelmingly opinionates the mind of a white man. He recognizes that it will take time to rid the racist history from the minds of the white man, and until that happens the only thing black people can do is find patience; patience through love. The idea that “black man are inferior to white men” is one, not true, and two, a belief that both Coates and Baldwin recognize as the core issue of inequality.

Until love can persevere, inequality will continue to exist. I love America and I feel very fortunate to live here. I can think of numerous issues that go on around the world that are incomparable to the problems we face as Americans. Places like the African Congo have suffered immensely from foreign invaders and tyrannical oppressors that want nothing more than to exponentially boost their overall wealth, even if it comes at the cost of human anguish through

slave labor. However, that should tell us that our problems, social and racial in nature should be easily fixed. I will later expose the pitiful history relating to the horrors of the African Congo. However, with knowledge comes patience and our journey is not yet there. We must first recognize that in reality (on the basis of the human existence), we are all one species at the end of the day, one being that should exist for progression, and not regression that is fueled by hate. As our history suggests, change can happen, it's just a matter of patience that unfortunately is needed because of the lack of willingness to find peace amongst all people, no matter the color of their skin.

### **Chapter 3: "The Negro" Problem**



To continue on the path of America's history and the issues that exist within it, I'd like to ask the question, what is "the negro"? This term has been used for centuries as it describes a

black individual. Both Baldwin and Coates were able to provide an extensive history behind the individual and the legacy of the term that followed. We identify “the negro” as a sort of a derogatory term, in the sense that it was never meant to be said in a friendly or respectful manner. Even watching movies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century like acclaimed director Quentin Tarantino’s *Django Unchained*, the term is used at an alarming rate. Yet, we must recognize that places like the Antebellum South in the 19<sup>th</sup> and even 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were fueled by hate and racism. “The negro”, in fact, can be viewed as a precursor to the racist term “nigger”, that has been used to put black people down for generations. I have heard these two words used in many different contexts throughout my life. We can even further look at Tarantino’s film as an example and recognize that both blacks and whites used the word. While one side used it for animosity, the other used it as a way to take away its overwhelmingly racist connotation. The revolution of the word has taken us to a point where it can be heard through a friend saying “nigga” as a substitution for the word “bro”, or a black man referring to another black man as a “nigga”. Now, notice the spelling and the two examples I described; they aren’t meant to be derogatory in nature. Over time, black people have claimed the word as their own, in order to camouflage the oppressing context it originated from. In my mind, the word does not affect me in anyway at all. When I hear it, I don’t hear any racism attached, rather I hear “dude”, “friend”, or “companion”. The censorship in America, in particular, has played a crucial part in stifling the progression that black individuals have tried to make in regards to the word. For instance, sitting in my dorm room in London, England during the Spring of 2018, I was alarmed when I heard words like “fuck”, “shit”, and “nigga” come from the television I happened to have on in the background. I turned to see that the popular television series “Top Boy” was on. It tells the story of Jamaican immigrants who turn to selling cocaine as their only way of survival. I watched the entire

episode only to realize that none of the violence, words, or even nudity was censored. I asked myself, how could the British government allow this on normal cable? Then I realized, the real question should have been why isn't America more like Britain and even Europe for that matter? In fact, our entire nation was built by former members of the British society that ventured to the New World for freedom from the tyranny of the crown. We are Britain's cousins and we should be the stronger cousins, not the "protected". With that, my claims in the year 2020 make no difference. I am not a politician or lawmaker, I am just merely a 22-year-old that can only use the power of the first amendment to voice my opinion. Continuing down the path of "the negro", some refer to the term as "the N word", which is just a politically correct way to say the word without really saying it. For instance, when I hear "the N word", the voice in my head says "nigger". Whether it is out of fear, or the inability to break away from the populist censorship America has engrained in us since birth, the word still has a long way to go before people become used to hearing it. Granted, there always comes a time where you need to use the word to describe a story or something of the sorts, however, I believe if people allowed themselves to be blinded towards skin color, then the word would just be another word without any racism or harm attached to it.

Now, to get back to the main point discussed by Coates and Baldwin as they discussed and highlighted their outlook on black people in America. As Coates dove into the systematic oppression of the American political system, Baldwin informs his nephew of the hardships black people face because of that oppression. These stories took place during the 20<sup>th</sup> century a time known to our history books as socially revolutionary. In today's landscape, author Jesmyn Ward, seems to find a clear mastery of both subject's ideas, particularly Baldwin's, and is able to transcribe their words into modern day language in her piece *The Fire This Time*. However, the

issues of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are still the same in the 21<sup>st</sup> as I mentioned through the use of the term “the negro”. Whether it was Coates referring to black children being born “endangered”, or Baldwin’s description of the “endangered” environment the country has created for black people in the “ghetto”, these issues still live on today. Ward, describes this issue best, “Though the white liberal imagination likes to feel temporarily bad about black suffering, there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black: no hands in your pockets, no playing music, no sudden movements, no driving your car, no walking at night, no walking in the day, no turning onto this street, no entering this building, no standing your ground, no standing here, no standing there, no talking back, no playing with toy guns, no living while black.” (Ward). Here, Ward provides us with examples of daily activities that seem normal and innocent, especially for the youth. Yet, due to the ongoing racism and stigmatic mental wiring that, in this case, white Americans have, no progression can be made. Furthermore, and attributing to the lack of progression, I find it very fascinating how Ward attacks the liberal white American society. I can almost tell in her words that she is referring to a cult of some sorts, one that poses as high and mighty because they are “woke”, or rather aware of the injustice that accumulates in this country. However, this “woke fullness” doesn’t mean anything if action does not occur. In other words, a hashtag like #BlackLivesMatter, does not present the necessary awareness for peace and justice that black people deserve. Yes, it may spread more news through social media outlets and garner more retweets, but as far as I’m concerned, America needs a new voice like the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This new voice will allow for inspiration, one that can be rallied behind under a common cause. Hashtags can only do so much, until that person sparks the evolutionary fire,

many black people will remain helpless and lost in the infected “ghettos” prescribed by the virus that constantly fights against the cultural immune system; racist white people.

Moving forward, Black people always have to look over their shoulder and live in fear, fear of the fact that they may be killed at any given moment; without any warning or reasoning. Notice how I used the word evolutionary instead of revolutionary at the end of my previous paragraph. A revolt can only do so much and without evolution attached, it can become stifled and result in endless violence. We as humans have existed for only thousands of years. In comparison to the universe, thousands don't nearly amount to billions. We are a young species in the grand scheme of things. Just like humans, America is also a young nation. This country has a long way to go before it can rightfully claim its dominance and prowess in history. If we really want to be recognized as the greatest nation on Earth, then we must set aside our differences for the common good. With Ward, she exemplifies not only black folks' relation to the idea of America's setbacks, but my personal experiences as well. Having grown up around a lot of minorities, specifically black and Hispanic, I would see first-hand how the police, for example looked and treated my friends of color. When I would find myself in the environment that Coates and Baldwin both described, I felt the tension and fear in the air. It always made me very uneasy and uncomfortable. Why should I have felt that way when around those that were meant to serve and protect? Whether it was “let's go down another street” or “fuck the cops, I didn't do anything wrong”, hate became the root of all evil; I became the observer to the divide.

History always repeats itself. This saying has stuck with me throughout my entire life and I've seen it in every aspect of history. I mentioned just how young America is, which contributes to the fact that we have become ignorant and even naïve. We like to forget how many of the great empires in history have fallen. We read about the Romans and the Greeks, but live with the

mindset that, “oh it won’t happen to us”. From the end of the great empires, to another child or person of color murdered by gun violence, the echo of time sends ripples towards the future. Looking back at the quote I focused on from Baldwin, “They are in effect still trapped in a history which they do not understand and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it.” (Baldwin). To reiterate Baldwin’s point, his words are meant to inform his nephew of the fact that white men believe that they are inherently superior to black men. They don’t know any better, it’s just the way it is; until progress is made history will remain on an endless loop of stagnation. America likes to believe it’s more powerful than say a Mexico, Whites believe they are better than blacks, this mindset is oblivious of history and is one that has assisted in the damnation of every living entity since the beginning of time. One being can only conquer for so long until they face an inevitable downfall.

To avoid this downfall, equality must be achieved. However, it is important to note the reasoning behind America’s path toward demise. Like Baldwin and Coates, Ward furthers her grievances towards the inherent white racism in America that she bluntly described in the first selection. Black people live in fear and cannot partake in numerous actions and activities that should be viewed as a normalcy. Furthermore, if these certain individuals choose to rebel or fight back in a violent way because of amounted frustrations then it becomes something like, “black people are a danger to society” or “do you see what these animals are doing to our way of life”. Even without violence, leaders like Dr. King tried to gain rights and equality through peaceful protests, however it is all the same to the white man. Peace is never truly found and “Instead, white rage carries an aura of respectability and has access to the courts, police, legislatures, and governors, who cast its efforts as noble, though they are actually driven by the most ignoble motivations. White rage recurs in American history. It exploded after the Civil War, erupted



again to undermine the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and took on its latest incarnation with Barack Obama's ascent to the White House. For every action of African American advancement, there's a reaction, a backlash." (Ward). Ward, describes this white rage as the unrelenting force behind black people's misfortunes, otherwise known as "the negro problem". This white rage stems from the fear that Coates and Baldwin both described in their pieces. It is shown in the politically corrupt government that continues to allow innocent black lives to be lost on any given day. Why should a nation, held so high atop the world's spectrum of great countries, allow for these deaths to incur? It is a true tragedy; the numbers are so high that society has become numb to these horrific actions. Granted, not all of these black involved deaths are at the hand of a white man, black on black crime is just as potent. Nevertheless, in both instances, these tribulations are due to the lack of opportunity, "ghettos", and the white elites' intentions that are set for black people to perish. This is an idea that all three authors can agree on; evident in their diverse pieces.

The idea that "one man can change the world" is clearly false, and as sad as it is to admit, we must accept this reality. Yes, I mentioned how people like Dr. King served as the face for change, but he did not achieve his goals by himself. He may have been the one that set the path toward equality for blacks in America, but other contributors like Rosa Parks who rallied behind his methods are the true heroes. Their bravery exemplify the theory that one man or women can certainly start an evolutionary movement towards change; one that will be engrained in the DNA of the following generations of Americans. But even with that, it takes a sea of passionate and relentless individuals to drive change forward. Until then, history will continue to replicate itself.

## Chapter 4: Greatness



What defines greatness? However, this question is not so much of a “what”, but a who. I believe we all aspire to be great in order to leave a legacy behind that staples our names in history. Whether it’s being a great friend, a superstar athlete, or even being great at something as little as recognizing right from wrong, in the end we all can achieve greatness. First, we must recognize the few individuals who possess an unrelenting drive and passion. These few find themselves atop civilizations, in control of the people, government, and society as a whole. It may sound like a daunting task, and it is rare to find someone suitable for the position. Our history tells us that from the beginning of time there have been many “great” individuals from the likes of Cleopatra and Alexander The Great, to more modern icons like Kobe Bryant and Barack Obama. These 4 individuals have all been defined as “great” by historians and professionals that society gives the authority to be the voices behind common knowledge. According to the dictionary, the word “great” is defined as, “of ability, quality, or eminence considerably above the normal or average.” Taking a look at ability, Kobe Bryant fits this category perfectly. He was gifted with an extraordinary talent an ability to play the game of

basketball. His athleticism and skillset were unmatched during his career. Cleopatra ruled over men at a time when women had little to no power or authority in society. Barack Obama, became the first black President of the United States. Alexander The Great, ruled over one of the greatest empires the world has ever seen. These people were fortunate enough to achieve greatness, a height most people will never reach in their lifetime. However, this doesn't mean this level is impossible to achieve. As these abilities have been replicated over time, history continues to repeat itself. Continually, "above the normal or average", is the key ingredient in defining the word "great". Not everyone is built for greatness, but that shouldn't stop anybody from trying. While some are given a free path to greatness, others must work for it. Every person has the potential of becoming great in anything they put their mind to as this mentality can help propel a person towards prominence.

By any means necessary. We often hear these words in movies or TV shows that depict police or soldiers going into combat to stop the bad guys. Whoever is at the leadership position often says these words to ingrain the message, "we must win". But what does winning get us? Barack Obama won the Presidential election and wasn't able to achieve all his goals in office. "Yes we can", only got the country so far forward. Even as a black president, White America grew even more hateful of black folks because they had lost their power in the White House. Now, this White America is only a part of the country that still flies the Confederate Flag from the Civil War. Yet, their power and influence seems to be constantly growing as these racists continue coming out of the woodwork to express their grievances and hatred towards minorities. While violence ensued, America became a nation on the brink of civil and cultural chaos.

Change won't happen without a leader willing to accomplish their goals by any means necessary. Sometimes this isn't achievable. Look at the great Kobe Bryant. He won an Oscar, 5

NBA championships, and ultimately died in a horrific and tragic helicopter crash. Winning isn't everything, and we must be prepared to face death at any given moment. This leads me to the story of Jay Gatsby. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel, *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby is depicted as a mysterious wealthy man that has a flare for the extravagant things in life. From his luxury car to his lavish home, these small victories serve to fill the void Gatsby so relentlessly tries to fill. As funny as it may be, Gatsby's problems can be compared to "The Negro Problem" exemplified by Coates and Baldwin. Now, in no way shape or form am I suggesting that Gatsby's life compares to the lives of millions of black people that have faced persecution, inequality, racism, and injustice all their lives. However, I believe black people's search for equality is matched with Gatsby's search for love and his journey to capture the American Dream.

To achieve equality, one must achieve their divine potential. As far as I'm concerned everyone should be equal, but that is sadly not the case. Baldwin and Coates define this reality perfectly in their quotes describing black people as "endangered" and "They are in effect still trapped in a history". These powerful words connect directly to Fitzgerald's wisdom as he defines an individual, "There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy and the tired." (Fitzgerald). These words can mean a lot of different things depending on the perspective they're read from, but there's no denying the simplicity and beauty about them. To become great and achieve one's goals you must be "the pursuing". As black people are "the pursuing" in America's long racial war for equality, they have also been "the pursued". The white man, has pursued black people for generations. Both out of fear and lust for power, they have denied minorities, not just black, the basic human rights that everyone deserves. On the other hand, Gatsby, has been deprived of love, a void so deep that all the materialistic items in the world

could not fill. He fits the category of “the busy”, busy trying to win over Daisy’s heart; his one priceless achievement. Whether he sees Daisy as another materialistic treasure or not is another question, it doesn’t matter in this case. He relentlessly tried and tried again year after year, slowly building his empire as he became the man he knew he’d have to become to have Daisy by his side. He was never a taker, rather a giver, offering his heart, soul, and all that he could possibly give to the woman of his dreams. Even so, his enemies, “the tired”, grew painfully angry at his unyielding ambition. The jealousy and resentment grew alongside his empire; even if it was tainted by crime. His busy mindset and force of determination would ultimately lead to his demise. This is something black people know far too well in relation to “white power” movements that seek to find a peaceful rest when the black man is finally consumed by their hatred. These unjust acts seek to accomplish only one thing; a white America.

The story of a man usually becomes a story of his significant other. The term “the women behind the man” is an apparent theme in this novel. Daisy strikes the reader in a way that brings attention to women’s stature in society. Since this novel takes place in the 1920’s we see men hold most of the rights to power and authority in society. During this time women were still fighting for their rights and an equal place among men. They just recently received the right to vote and used their authority to implement the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment which outlawed the sale and consumption of alcohol, otherwise known as prohibition. However, this decision would backfire, resulting in a decade of crime surrounded by the illegal sale of liquor and backdoor clubs known as speakeasys. In search for her independence, Daisy realized that she was truly lost in the world of men. This idea is exemplified in the line, “I hope she’ll be a fool -- that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.” (Fitzgerald). Daisy’s words clearly parallel the lives of black people in America. As both entities lack the proper rights and positions of power, they

fall into the category of expendable. In order to find a place for themselves, they must have a specific quality that is deemed valuable. For Daisy, her beauty allowed her to attract men of wealth that helped her live a life of prosperity, even if she never had control over her own situation. For black people, both Coates and Baldwin allude to the idea that society has set a path for them to make a name for themselves, however they never are able to gain control over their own fate. For instance, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ward discusses instances when black people gain prominence, but are still controlled by a higher entity. Whether this is as an athlete or musician, there is always a manager or owner that has the final say in their career moves. The women and the black man are never able to become truly free of societal norms that have blocked their pathways to success and freedom for generations.

Greatness is measured by who you know and not by what you know. Whether this is true or not remains to be seen, nevertheless, it was reality for Gatsby and Daisy in the novel. Gatsby's mentor enabled him to become a prominent figure in society while Daisy's male companions allowed her to experience the riches in life without a care in the world. At the end of the day this all comes at a cost. Whether it's heartbreak or death, Fitzgerald describes the situation best, "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." (Fitzgerald). Looking back at the Antebellum South, Fitzgerald's words resonate with the hymns sung on the vast field's blacks were forced to work on during their enslavement. "So we beat on, boats against the current" in particular, parallels the unrelenting bravery black folk had, which enabled them to find some sort of acceptance for their doomed fate. They knew all too well that there was little to no hope for any sort of normalcy in their lives at that particular time in history. They accepted the white man's designed fate, but would not give in to death, realizing the true enemy was from within; their hopeless souls. The countless generations of black people that lived their lives with

the same mentality in hopes of someday achieving freedom, allowed for the rebellious nature that we've seen in the last 10 years. While divide is evident, most recognize the need for more work to be done. The chains may have been broken, but the opportunities are still withheld.

### **Chapter 5: Who are the Donkey's?**



Humans are inherently violent. From the beginning of man, the commonly used term “Survival of the Fittest” has been the backbone of shaping various societies and civilizations throughout the world. This is a massive reason why black folk have less opportunities and attributes to the greatness factor I described in Fitzgerald’s Gatsby. People will go to great lengths to achieve success, security, and a defined peace that comes at the cost of others’ tribulations. In particular, we see this exact theme play out over hundreds of years between two very different looking, but similarly acting groups of individuals. Africans and the whites, or Africans versus the whites, has been a war of attrition on various fronts. From the homelands of the African mainland to the continental United States, black people have been persecuted and deemed as less than by “cleansed” whites who seek only to profit off of the misfortunes of others. The horrific violence that became a normalcy like lynching, served as a method to instill

fear in black people, while halting their efforts towards equality. We see this theme exemplified by all of the authors in some way or another. Both Baldwin and Coates give us a firsthand view of their interpretations of society and the realities for a black man living in it. To reiterate this idea, both authors use the term “endangered” to describe a black man living in society. Baldwin bluntly states, “that black men are inferior to white men.” (Baldwin). This is an idea that clearly attributes to the fact that, “This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish.” (Baldwin). I will continue to use and refer to this quote because I want to engrain it in the minds of whoever reads this piece. It is important to listen to statements numerous times in order to actually hear the message that is being pushed across. These feelings and thoughts are felt all throughout the black community and will continue to be experienced until equality is achieved.

Reputation and identity define who we are, as they serve as the backbone of crafting a memorable legacy. This theme is central for both the stories of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* as well as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. As both stories describe experiences in the African mainland, specifically the Congo region, they attempt to present the reader with the root of all evil. I mentioned the African Congo and told you I would come back to it. It is not a place for the weak and one must be prepared for death when venturing into the dark depths of its ever-flowing river. This story serves as the precursor to America’s sins during the global slave trade. Colonialism, is a practice that has been used for centuries all throughout various reigns of imperial expansion. For Africa, white European colonists saw it as a valuable asset in exploiting its natural resources. However, these natural resources soon turned from materials to flesh. Slavery became a common custom as people were taken from their homelands and forced into servitude. Looking back on history we see the white man as evil and greedy. They would



ferociously push towards achieving their goals by any means necessary, no matter the cost of life.

A single man can embody numerous qualities. In the two stories, *Things Fall Apart* and *Heart of Darkness*, both central characters, Marlow, and Okonkwo not only experience but view the trials and tribulations of those around them. These two men are not unlike the modern individual. Fear and greed are engrained in the human genetic code. No matter how hard we attempt to suppress these two emotions, they will always exist. Taking place in Africa, we follow one white man, Marlow, and one African native, Okonkwo. Though their journeys differ, they both come to the realization that all men, no matter the color, are inherently savage in nature. The common European misconception that blacks are savages, became an inverse reality in these stories. Marlow, explains this idea when he watches a group of white bandits from the Eldorado Exploring Expedition embark on their journey into the dangerous Congo region, "In a few days the Eldorado Expedition went into the patient wilderness, that closed upon it as the sea closes over a diver. Long afterwards the news came that all the donkeys were dead. I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals. They, no doubt, like the rest of us, found what they deserved. I did not inquire." (Conrad). Here, Marlow compares the bandits to donkeys; useless and less important than humans. He does not value their life as worthy of survival and believes that it was their fate to die on the journey because they never belonged there in the first place. In addition, this feeling exemplifies the idea that the loss of a few white men is incomparable to the travesties black people in the region have faced. From the white man occupying their land and stripping it of its natural resources, to the racist view of black people founded on ignorance, he no longer wants to be a part of it. This should remind you of America, a place built on corruption

and anger. The Europeans may have started the slave trade, but America was quick to indulge in the enterprise as well.

On the other hand, Achebe offers the perspective of the African male. In his story, we see Okonkwo suffer the fate of numerous misfortunes. To begin, he serves to prove the stereotype wrong that “black people are lazy”, a common idea both Baldwin and Coates exposed from the perspective of white men they have encountered throughout their lives. This is an unfortunate and ill-informed view that served to wrongly portray black people for centuries. It was a tactic implemented by the white man to degrade and devalue blacks around the world. However, Okonkwo serves as the example to disprove this illusion. He is a hardworking man that values the idea that wealth comes to those that work for it. Nonetheless, we see Okonkwo as a hardened individual that not only fails to show affection for his adoptive son Ikemefuna, but beats his wife Ojiugo for her negligence. Unlike Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*, Ojiugo does not receive any sort of materialistic items and comfort from money. The two both live the life their male counterparts have planned for them. Okonkwo continuously tries to repent to prove his worth and value to the village, seeking forgiveness. How can one receive forgiveness for harming a loved one and who has the authority to grant it?

Religion, has been and still is a powerful entity in the history of mankind. Okonkwo uses it to bring value to his life as well as protect him from “sin” or the evils in the world. When we are part of a group we not only try to become the most righteous, but live to prove our loyalty and worth to a common ideal. Okonkwo personifies this idea when he chooses to cut down, or kill Ikemefuna in hopes of maintaining the trust and respect of his tribesmen. This event starts a domino effect that brings harm and an infectious disease that takes hold on Okonkwo’s life. Here, I see a man that suffers from the sins of the world because he is blinded by false values

that he lives by in hopes of creating an image of himself that others can respect. Instead, he should stay true to himself and the person that he is and not the person others want him to be. This is a common reality amongst numerous individuals in society that lack a personal and distinct identity.

Truth comes in many forms. Going back to the idea of religion, we see Okonkwo and his family/tribesmen encounter white missionaries that seek to spread the value of Christianity, a widely practiced faith in modern America. In fact, this country was built on the backbone of religion and its numerous Christian faiths. To me, this parallels the colonialist tendencies white men in power “throw on” to the common individual, specifically minorities. Their close-minded personalities and view on the world attribute to the fact that they believe they are the shepherd while black people, for example, are the sheep of society. This biblical reference goes hand in hand with Okonkwo’s conflict against the “visiting” Europeans. They seek to exploit the savagery from the clansmen that reflects the common misconception that Africans are violent. Sadly, Okonkwo succumbs to this stereotype and wishes to spark an uprising against the invaders, only to be unsupported. This realization forces him to lose all hope in humanity as well as those he trusted most. In the end he hangs himself, and with his death hope for equality goes with him. Achebe beautifully explains this reality, “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.” (Achebe). In other words, when a situation gets bad it can quickly get worse. All hope becomes lost when an individual’s power is taken from them, a fact that is clearly seen through Okonkwo. He became an anti-martyr and a pawn in the white man’s journey to expose African’s inferiority in the world.

From Okonkwo and Marlow to Baldwin and Coates we see the realities of different “tribes” and the battle for superiority. For blacks, we see individuals who seek justice and

equality, only to be put down by the white elites who continue to hold a majority stake in world influence and power. Even F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, proves that this reality extends past color as gender roles are another concern of discrimination. Society may think the practice of colonialism has ended, but in reality, its ramifications have never been clearer and more alive than they are in 2020.

### **Chapter 6: National Treasure**



Does a nation define your identity? Shifting gears, I am an American, born and raised in Los Angeles, California. Throughout my life I have traveled around the country to the Eastern Shores of Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts to the dry desert of Phoenix, Arizona. America is massive and has an immense amount of different geographical and cultural locations that make up its diverse landscape. I've always felt like I needed to indulge myself into different worldly cultures having grown up around individuals of numerous backgrounds. Two years ago, I had the opportunity to study abroad in London, UK. I absolutely loved my time there and learned a lot about not only myself, but what the world really has to offer. I ventured to Berlin, Amsterdam,

Paris, and Barcelona and indulged in the different languages and cultures that were so very distinct. I was fascinated by the fact that all of these cities in Europe are in countries that neighbor each other, but have so many differences. From the architecture, food, language, and lifestyle, each offered a new world to explore and bask in their wonders. I found myself changing each and every minute during my travels. Changing in the sense that my outlook on life and how I wanted to live it began to defy the America I grew up in. Now, I am a “city boy” and always have been. From taking local buses and subways from a very young age to my infatuation with architecture and culture I have always used that knowledge to establish my independence and self-awareness. I can get along with virtually anyone no matter their color, creed, sexual orientation, or religion. I have no bias or hold any negative sentiment to any individual. This is something that I feel America is lacking. I use travel as a way to gain knowledge, not as a way to erase it from history. I serve as the opposition to imperialism. I allow myself to absorb rather than take. We must realize that America is the land of opportunity, a place where anything is possible. We have enough power and enough people from different places to craft replicas of foreign countries. We don’t need more because we have already taken so much. We must appreciate what we have in order to find balance. Look at Coates and Baldwin, for example. These two minds are both within black bodies. They could use hate as a tool to fight back against their oppressors, but instead use knowledge and experience to allow others to decide for themselves what’s right from wrong. Unfortunately, their race is “endangered” and continues to fight an enemy that doesn’t seem to back down. Fortunately for me, I have not personally experienced this reality, I’ve only seen it occur from a third-party perspective. Racism exists, sexism exists; hatred fuels evil. Black folks know this reality all too well and that’s why I want

to shift my focus towards the value of traveling and immersing oneself into a multitude of cultures; the true value of what it means to be worldly.

I mentioned traveling to different cities and countries during my time abroad. However, I left out one distinct place I found to stand out from the rest. Killarney, Ireland, a land of history, beer, and beauty. It is located on the Southwest Shores of Kerry County and houses small towns, pubs, historical churches, castles, and of course the famous Ring of Killarney. Having immersed myself in the culture I was able to talk to locals about everything from politics to where to get the best beer in town. The residents seemed to live a simple lifestyle, one filled with joy and gratitude. As an outsider I was able to develop a new opinion on the American lifestyle and the issues that come with Patriotism. Now, this thought doesn't mean I don't love my country, it just means I can value the good parts of others as well and implement them into my own life. I found the value of traveling and free living to be of the utmost importance in finding happiness and gaining new knowledge. This brings me to the Irishman, Rodger Casement. His story saw him travel around the world to places like Great Britain, the Nigerian Congo, and Brazil. In Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Dream of a Celt*, he recounts Casement's life journey and the trials and tribulations that came with it. In particular I want to focus on his time in the Congo as well as his interactions with other numerous nations and cultures. I already discussed Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as well as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The topic of colonialism and its effects on both parties involved was at the forefront of discussion. In addition, religion also played a role in the colonialist nature of European nations that were highlighted in both stories. To reiterate my thinking, we saw the evil that exists in men and the human nature's role in "survival of the fittest" take full effect through *The Heart of Darkness*'s Marlow as he explained an expedition gone wrong in the dangerous region of the Congo, "They, no doubt, like the rest of

us, found what they deserved. I did not inquire.” (Conrad). Similarly, Casement experienced events like that of the Eldorado Expedition while serving the British Government in the Congo. He unfortunately, was able to participate in and experience the horrors of the African slave trade and how poorly the white Europeans treat the African natives. This period would parallel ensuing events for centuries to come, evident in Ward’s *The Fire this Time*. The same social and racial issues that were brought to life in the Congo, continue to be thriving in minority communities around the United States. The “endangered” black man is still experiencing the ramifications of colonialism.

Again, one man can’t save the world. People like Harriet Tubman are remembered for being the individuals’ that sparked a particular movement garnering the ability to find success through strength in numbers. Casement, was tasked by the British government as Traveling Commissioner and British consul in different regions of the Belgian Congo. He investigated and reported on human rights abuse. His reports were astonishing as the British crown laid down harsh penalties on the Belgian government for their incompetence and lack of proper treatment towards the natives of the Congo region. This particular instance is a reality in numerous places around the world. Casement, was able to experience and learn about them during his ventures to Brazil. He found that the Amazon and Congo were essentially one in the same. Each place suffered similar fates from the consequential colonialist actions played by foreign European governments that sought to strip the land and natives of their basic human rights and natural resources that were deemed invaluable to the world trade system. This is an example of the human evolution. The power of Darwinism, “survival of the fittest”, plays a role throughout history, something Casement even later found to be true in his own birth country of Ireland.

Ireland, a place of religious enlightenment. I know all too well the hypocrisy of religion. I realize I make mistakes, but that doesn't make me any worse than the person next to me. We are not perfect because we are all different. How can somebody attached to a specific religion like Christianity look down upon me for choosing not to believe in its methods? The reality is Christians sin. This statement is something that needs to be accepted and admitted to by Christians themselves. I do not speak for all Christians, but the outrageous hypocrisy needs to stop. "The righteous will conquer", is a biblical statement that holds many truths within the realm of colonialism and the mentality many ordained rulers held during eras like the slave trade. With Christianity being a wide spread and highly practiced religion, places like Europe that sit atop the religious hierarchal chain, have used their influence and power to force their beliefs and way of life on "non-believers". In particular, this experience is felt throughout history in places like the African Congo as well as the Brazilian Amazon, in Casement's case. Additionally, the slave trade saw many enslaved Africans convert to Christianity due to the manipulation of the white holy man that would often times "eradicate the sinner". Casement was no stranger to this experience and fought to defend the human rights of the oppressed.

Nobody likes a broken record, but Casement serves as a man that noticed the realities of racism and how it is ingrained in our society's history. He took it upon himself to make a difference, but again no man can solve an issue this large alone. This story continues to write new chapters each day as the same fundamental problems continue to exist. Enforced religion, colonialism, and the protection of white privilege serve as the root of all evil. In more unique terms, the holy are unholy in many instances, leaving us to ask the question, does religion actually save, or should the murdering and enslaving false prophets be forced to repent for their crimes on humanity and the oppression of minority nations around the world?



## Chapter 7: Death Sucks



Death is inevitable. It is not a choice, we do not choose when we die even if we wish to live. Life happens when we sleep, walk to school, and even when and if we pray. Choosing to be a good Samaritan doesn't change the fact that we will eventually meet our demise. I consider myself a pretty fearless individual. Clowns, horror films, heights, spiders; none of these things scare me. The only thing that comes to mind when thinking about phobias or fears are bees. I'm not scared of bees, I just don't like to be stung. One item I do consider myself being frightened by is death. Like the good Samaritan, I choose to be a good person. Yes, like anybody I have my flaws, but I always try my best to do the right thing. I find myself fearing death because of my love for life. We only have one and I hope it never gets taken away from me early. I aspire to live a long and prosperous life, one filled with excitement, joy, adventure, risk, love, and success. Throughout history mother nature has tested the human mind, body, and soul. As we continue to craft new technologies, build new empires, and add to the already overcrowded population, threats like global warming have been set in motion to remind us that we as humans are only

guests in this massive world. We share it with millions of other organisms and life forms that are just as earthly as we are. In addition, from as far as I can tell, history shows that human life is expendable. In other words, in order to forge successful progression in society, leaders throughout Earth's chronicles have used humans as building instruments rather than valuing them as equals. This is evident in the history of the African. From Coates and Baldwin (I know I keep referring back to them), we are able to relive the horrors black people have had to endure for generations. The only time they seem to be equal is when there is an existing threat that opposes all human life regardless of color or religion. This brings me back to the topic of religion, which has been evident in the majority of the stories I've already mentioned. Numerous religions claim that their God will protect them from the evils of the world. This leaves me to ask the question, why does evil prevail more often than not? Also, who defines what is evil and what is not? I believe it is a matter of perspective, and from the perspective of humans, the Coronavirus (for example) is a perfect entity to serve as the evil that brings humans together.

Obsession breeds irrational decisions. With obsession comes love and with love comes obsession. This was evident in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. In the novel we follow an aging German writer Gustav von Aschenbach and his experience with disease, obsession, love, and death. Ironically, the Coronavirus in many ways parallels the outbreak of Cholera historically depicted in the novel. Today, Italy has the highest death toll and is taking extreme caution in its attempt to combat the disease. On the other hand, the Italian authorities in the story attempt to hide the extremity of the situation, only to have it get out of hand at a rapid rate.

What defines love? For Gustav, he finds love in the form of a 14-year-old boy named Tadzio. Although they never make contact in the story (that would be odd), Gustav finds himself obsessed with the boy's daily activities and life as a whole. Whether it's his admiration or

longing for another chance at youth, or sincerity for the child's chances of contracting cholera, he acts against the social norm of abandoning the city and takes his chances with catching the disease. This brings me to my thoughts on the Coronavirus.

Everyone's opinion matters. There are bad opinions and there are good opinions. However, bad and good is often defined by so called experts that hold the "loudest" voices in society. For example, many college students, including myself, were meant to be on Spring Break. For many, the popular opinion was to stay on course and enjoy vacation as much as possible. This means drinking and partying with the mentality, "If I get the virus then so be it". In a way this is exactly the feeling Gustav has, only the partying and drinking equalate his monitoring of Tadzio. He doesn't pay any real mind to the disease and chooses to ride it out, becoming more daring each passing day. His mentality is depicted perfectly in his idea that "true art is produced only in defiant despite of corrupting passions and physical weaknesses." (Mann). Here, his obsession is captured perfectly. People today can learn a great lesson through these words. I see them as the idea that even in a time of crisis we can find great passion and a new-found commitment to ourselves, someone or something that we deeply care about. This can be learning a new instrument during our isolated time, taking a trip to a remote isolated oasis or paradise that brings clarity and peace, or even catching up on school work and applying for jobs to set up a clear path for our futures. I contribute to the ladder and I hope that for all of our sakes, we come out of this crisis more vigilant, aware, stronger, passionate, compassionate, selfless, and willing to work together towards a better tomorrow so we do not make the same mistakes that stem from our lack of preparedness and inability to recognize the severity of issues like the Coronavirus pandemic. Instead of selfishly trying to make America great again, how about we make the world great for all of its people suffering from this dark time in our history.

## Chapter 8: How many God's are there?



A quote I have heard throughout my life by a multitude of religious practitioners is “We are all God’s creatures”. No, we are individuals that have been birthed through evolution spanning billions of years from tiny cells that have amassed into trillions of life forms. We, the human race, are one of the many life forms that are fortunate enough to exist on a planet that provides us with the necessities of life. Oxygen, carbon dioxide, and an atmosphere that allows us to breath fresh air, feel the rays of the raging sun, and even have light in times of darkness as the moon shines down on us from outer space. It doesn’t matter if we are American, Spanish, Russian, we all come from the same evolutionary chain. I am not a religious person, but I do respect the value of religion. It may seem like I only point out the flaws in say a Christianity, but I believe everyone should have some sort of belief system and spirituality that offers a sense of stability, faith, and security. Religions are like humans, they aren’t perfect, however the people that practice them choose to believe they are. This is a problem that cannot be fixed overnight. It coincides with racism, but fortunately one thing allows for the potential to hold the world, or America for that matter together. Whether it’s believing in one’s self or a higher power like God, the power of hope enables us to expand our mind and progress as a species. Hope parallels the

future and as long as we keep it alive change can ensue. With that, who is God? Is there a single individual that has billions of believers worldwide? Or are there numerous that represent different arenas of the world? For Catholics, the former is true, while the latter belief existed for Ancient civilizations like the Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians. Who is to say that Greek Mythology is fake, maybe Gods in polytheistic societies really did exist and the word “mythology” attached to the belief system was placed in order to serve as propaganda for non-believers. On the other hand, maybe Jesus Christ, the Son of God, really did walk on water. History only tells truth to a certain extent. At the end of the day recorded history from thousands of years ago had to have been altered and changed some way or another. The technology we have today did not exist back then which meant scribes and scholars that had the ability to read and write were responsible for informing the next generations of what was and what could be.

Regardless of my mini rant, maybe both the Catholics and the Greeks were right in their own way. I respect all religions, and love the metaphorical and lifestyle value they provide me. Principles like respect thy neighbor and entities such as Tranquillitas, the Egyptian Goddess of peace and tranquility, serve to offer me both solidarity and symbolism that I can not only relate to, but implement into my daily life. This is one of the reasons why America is deemed as “great” by many. It is a place that allows people to practice religion freely. Yes, there are forms of radicalization that exist within religious sects throughout America, but for the most part we should be thankful for our first Amendment that allows for the freedom of religious choice. That is one of the reasons why this country was established in the first place, evident in the Plymouth colony who had hoped to break away from Britain’s tyrannical crown that sought to oppress religion. The new world was meant to be a safe and free-living environment protected from malevolence. However, greed and expansionism saw these same colonists commit hypocritical

acts which attributed towards them becoming no better than the same oppressors they hoped to rid themselves of. With that, how can we trust the so-called Holy people in this world when at the end of the day we are all sinners in some way or another.

Evil exists all around us and within us as sinners. Author Nawal El Saadawi, depicts evil in the form of man in her story *God Dies By The Nile*. In it, we follow Zakeya, a field worker who lives a simple life in her village Kafr El Teen located on the peaceful and fertile Nile River Valley. Unfortunately for her, life in the village is not very peaceful at all as the Mayor, Sheikh Hamzawi of the mosque, and the Chief of the Village Guard are corrupt and fueled by greed and power. Hamzawi's obsession with wealth drives him to prey upon the women in the village, like a vulture hunting human flesh. Once entangled in his grasp he enslaves the women and later marries them only to abuse and rape them whenever he pleases. This is much like the pilgrims who tortured and killed countless native Americans at the pleasure of enforcing their religious views upon them. We can even look at it as another form of enslavement that coincides with both Daisy and Ojiugo's situations in their respective stories. They were subjected to the power of men, and never were able to break free from the shackles of their control. With Zakeya, she lives in hopes of avoiding this conflict while maintaining her faith in God. However, her niece eventually falls victim to Hamzawi's wrath and helplessly accepts the fact that women have no choice or power in their lives. She becomes enraged, conjuring a sense of fury from the injustice in her society, only to become possessed by demons.

Often times God is nowhere to be found in times of crisis even if it involves his believers. Like many who suffer from the sins of society, the operating mindset becomes, "Pray again, Zakeya. Pray to Allah that he may return safely, and Nefissa too. Where could the girl have gone? Where?" (Saadawi). Here, I see a weak and helpless individual who is blinded by their

own faith. Time and time again women are continually raped, tortured, and mistreated in Zakeya's society. With this knowledge, how can they continually rely upon God to fix the problems. If God was with us, as believers say, then why does he not immediately put an end to the fury of diabolical people like Hamzawi who emulate his fallen creation; Satan. I don't blame Zakeya for allowing her rage to open the gates for demons to possess her soul. Sometimes in life, as history shows, evil can only be combatted by evil. For example, World War II opened up the gates of hell. From Hitler's mass genocide of people of the Jewish faith to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, innocence was lost while the "good" triumphed over the bad. But at what cost? America decided it was necessary to drop a hydrogen bomb on a city full of men, women, and children that had nothing to do with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The war may have ended, but both sides participated in treacherous acts of violence. Again, where was God then? How about when Africans were forcefully taken from their homeland and shipped off to unknown worlds to serve the all-powerful and "holy" white man; where was God then? I'll tell you where his so-called people were, they were the one's responsible for slavery and the inequality that would follow for generations to come. The majority of slave owners stripped the black men and women of their traditional African beliefs and faith, and out of fear provided the enslaved with a new religion and belief in their almighty God. Times like these make me wonder if God really exists. How can the apparent originator of life, humanity, and all that we know allow his creations to suffer and perish like Zakeya and her innocent niece? Doesn't the "Holy" Bible claim that all men and women are created equal? Why are black men and even women for that matter deemed as less than in numerous societies throughout the world? God may be depicted as a white man because men were the only ones capable of recording history before

Christ's apparent death. They were the educated, the scribes and scholars while women and blacks lived to serve.

I can't help myself speak on the behalf of the multitude of individuals who have fallen victim to the devilish nature of humanity and the privation that God allows to exist due to his continuous absence in times of catastrophe. Even with the Coronavirus pandemic and the millions of lives effected one way or another, no single God can save us all. I cannot be clearer when I say that in times like these we need to remain strong and put our faith in one another. We do not need to solely look out for China, America, or Italy because we are one; one species and one planetary nation on Earth that should come together for the sake of humanity in order to preserve the gift of life.

### **Chapter 9: When you are nowhere, you are still somewhere.**



America has had its fair share of trials and tribulations. Yes, it has been the cause of many like the slave trade and the ramifications that came after like the Civil War, but it currently faces an invisible enemy. I am sick of this situation; the coronavirus. Come to think of it, I'm pretty positive I had the virus back in December. During Christmas I laid in bed, unable to move



while I was left alone. For about 10 days I was extremely ill and felt awful. Fortunately, I had just started to get over the sickness and was able to properly celebrate New Years Eve. I thought to myself, 2020 is going to be a great year and a start of an even better decade. That thought quickly spiraled down the drain with the pandemic crisis. Now, I have no graduation, I'm stuck at home, I haven't been able to see my friends, I was laid off my paid internship, every sport season has either been postponed or canceled, it has become exponentially harder to find a job, and with all that, my future is very uncertain. I feel like I have entered a new dimension, some sort of void that is lost in space and time. Everyday seems like the same, I get up around 11:00 AM, try to be productive by reaching out to contacts that could potentially help me get a job this summer, workout, walk around my neighborhood, eat dinner, watch a movie, play video games until 3 in the morning then go to sleep. If you have ever seen the movie "Edge of Tomorrow", Tom Cruise basically has the ability to travel back in time in order to attempt to figure out how he can help defeat the vile alien enemy that threatens to exterminate the human race. As he fails and dies time and time again he must continue going back to memorize the exact steps he must take to break his curse and save the day. This sort of Purgatory parallels playwright Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, as well as the current situation of the world as a whole.

People are the most essential part of any civilization. Yes, we all need food and water to survive, but if there are no people left for consumption, then these items are pointless. This virus is almost like a shadow, taunting us in every which way. It often allows us to feel and think that we are safe, but a new case always seems to pop up that again shoves us back into our homes. The people I walk by at the grocery store may have the virus as well as the people above me in my building. The problem with this virus's asymptomatic nature is that it can be very harmful to others, alluding to the ideas mentioned earlier like imperialism and religion. They both may have

had good intentions, but chose to pay no mind to the possible harm they continued to cause to others. This is where the need for selflessness comes into play. Even if we aren't experiencing any issues we still can't risk engaging with others because they have the potential to be horribly affected. I spoke of remaining vigilant, however I feel like even as hard as I try to think positive, my patience is starting to run low. I am a people's person, I love being around people because I thrive in those types of environments. I feed on the energy of those around me, boosting my positive emotions and lifeline. I feel invigorated by good weather and even better people. However, at this moment in time, the world has taken that away from me.

There is No exit. As far as I can tell, we are going to be stagnant for a while. I have tried to accept this fact, but it has not been easy. In Sartre's play, he centers on three individuals, Garcin, Inez, and Estelle. I love his representation of hell and how even a common place like a dull furnished second empire style room can bring people to madness. On the contrary, religions like Catholicism would never depict this situation or even define it as a hell; maybe a purgatory, but not hell. There aren't any pits of fire or demons, just three people led to a mysterious room by a valet. Each individual refuses to accept their fate, unwilling to admit their crimes or sins. Estelle, exemplifies this idea when asked why she was placed in this hell, "That's just it. I haven't a notion, not the foggiest. In fact, I'm wondering if there hasn't been some ghastly mistake." (Sartre). Denial is the quickest way to turn a pure soul into one haunted by the insecurities of disappointment and failure. When we deny, we lie, and nobody appreciates a liar. No matter how good we may be at lying, in the end the truth always finds its way into the fold. The words "Damned Souls" are continuously spoken by all three characters, but when Inez brings it up for the first time, she sheds light on her realization, "There have been people who burned their lives out for our sakes-- and we chuckled over it. So now we have to pay the reckoning." (Sartre).

Here, we see Inez begin her path to repentance as she recognizes that based upon their stories and background, they all have some sort of sin they're either hiding or running away from. She realizes that this is the enemy they must face, not a torturer or hellish obstacle; it is themselves and the lies they hold within.

Feeling trapped is not easy. Throughout the play each character evolves out of self-interest. They finally admit their crimes, Garcin as the cheater and domestic abuser, Inez as the sexual seducer, and Estelle as the cheater who drowned her illegitimate child. Even with releasing themselves from the lies, they are still trapped, wondering why they cannot leave. This moment parallels our situation as quarantined individuals. Even with knowing the truth about the virus and how much it has affected the world around us, we are still unable to leave our homes. As humans, during a time like this we often become annoyed with those around us, taking out our frustrations on others. This is a sign of weakness displayed by the three characters, when self-interest starts to become apparent. Garcin wants forgiveness for his cowardice, Estelle wants Garcin's sexual attention, and Inez wants to frustrate Estelle. They all seem to be pitted against one another and when Garcin attempts to escape he ultimately fails. Whether this is due to the lack of faith in one another remains to be seen, but I can surely apply it to our history.

When we look back at black folks in America, faith is what drove them to achieve equality. This also applies to women gaining the right to vote as well as the soldiers who risked their lives in WW2 to defeat the evil Nazi regime. The common bond a group of people or a nation as a whole share is driven by faith, and with it anything is possible. On the other hand, when faith is lost and the belief system that was established suffers, individuals begin to turn on one another out of self-interest and fear. This is made apparent when Estelle attempts to stab and kill Inez, forgetting they are all in fact dead. This action suggests that they are unable to come

together for the common purpose of escaping. Garcin realizes that the hell was never the room or the purgatory, it was in fact themselves; people unwilling to work together and get a long for a common purpose.

These characters parallel America. When the virus was officially announced in China, America and its big macho ego stood tall and told us that we should be aware of the virus, but the concern level was not very high. We were still able to go on with our normal lives, having events like Mardi Gras, NBA basketball games, and other large gatherings. Fast forward a week or two and everything went to hell. Panic levels were very high as people began hoarding toilet paper and other essential at home items. Greed began to kick in and Darwinism became the lifestyle for everyone around the world. Now, looking at Tom Cruise in the film as well as the three characters in *No Exit*, they all had a common enemy. For Cruise and the rest of the world it was an alien race, for the three characters it was themselves and their own demons, and for us it is a virus. Instead of hoarding items and acting selfishly out of fear, we all need to abide by the same rules and regulations so that we can accelerate the healing process. When a common enemy is present it becomes crucial for everyone to be on the same page in order to achieve victory. I want my life to get back to normal, but before that can happen we all need a reality check. That means America, the White House in particular, needs to admit they were at fault and have made this virus worse than it should have been just like they continue to ignore the fact that racists continue to oppress and prey upon minorities. With the virus fault, this was due to the fact that they cut funding and halted the disease prevention control program that was meant to foresee events like the Covid-19 pandemic. If we were able to recognize the idea that history repeats itself, we could have been more prepared to fight back against a pandemic like virus. For the future, it means we need to set up programs and develop a new way of living in order to prevent

future pandemics from occurring. There is a lot of work to be done, but as I continuously preach the word legacy, we all need to be on board with protecting the future of humanity and our many great civilizations around the world.

### **Chapter 10: The Trilogy**



Mind, body, and soul. These words serve as the trilogy for the individual or the “I” that is often referred to in Nobel Prize-winner Gao Xingjian’s novel *Soul Mountain*. Before I get into the complexity of this story, Xingjian seems to lay the groundwork for human existence and our interconnectivity with Earth. To the planet, we are like living cells. Some of us support its immune system and offer it nutrients to preserve its lifeforce, while others invade and attack its organs, weakening and often times destroying parts of its body. As humans we should all find this realization and make it a point to treat our planet as we treat ourselves. The saying “what goes into your body shapes who you are and what you are to become” (possibly an alteration of some original quote that I will take credit for here) plays a vital role not only in this novel, but in life itself. The human capacity to intake information from a standpoint of the senses is very complex. While it’s not immeasurable, because certain species have differing abilities and

heightened senses, we are amongst the top of the predatorial chain which has enabled us to be the dominant species on Earth. With that, we often times become blind to the world around us. As we continue to create and evolve, the age of technology has threatened to forever alter our outlook on life as far as humanistic values go. Pollution, deforestation, and other harmful acts serve as the numerous diseases Earth continues to combat each and every day. Now, I am not a radicalistic environmentalist by any means, but at least I'm more than aware of the harm we cause by not taking the necessary steps to at least slow the process of Earth's eventual demise. So, is the coronavirus telling us something? The Earth must be speaking to us in some way or another. Now more than ever, we need to be conscious of this reality because our world is changing for the worst, and like humans, Earth is fighting back. However, the inability to recognize this reality is dangerous. Some choose to ignore the inevitable, while others choose to follow what religion tells them to. Numerous sects of Christianity claim global warming is a fallacy. They tell us that it is all part of God's plan and we don't have to worry about the possibility of a city like Paris or New York floating off into the ocean. I for one don't want my city to become the next Atlantis, but unfortunately a multitude of doubters still exist around the world. This is the Achilles heel of the human society.

Looking back on the great revolutions in human history, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we saw the ignorance of the righteous white man conjure violence and death because of racism and their inability to accept those who are colored. Black folk finally reached their breaking point as leaders like Malcolm X rose to the occasion to do everything in their power to put an end to inequality. We saw women in the 1920's take a stand against the abuse suffered from men as they successfully enacted the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment which outlawed alcohol. Even today, movements like Make America Great Again and socialistic progressivism are both radical in

nature no matter what side you view them from. These movements are deemed drastic because of the built-up tension that has existed throughout the years. Additionally, inheritance and ignorance play a contributing role, paralleling the idea that we are born with a belief system ingrained in our DNA that can only be altered with the power of free will and the willingness to accept change. This attributes to the idea that we are often blind to the world around us, taking issues for granted until the pot boils over. We are truly living in a melting pot of difference. There is virtually no singular individual who acts the same or looks the same. We are all our own people, the “I’s” in this ever-evolving worldly community.

Disease leads to rot. It takes time for a disease to die but it can quickly spread. But what is a disease? Is it something like the coronavirus or cholera described in Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*? Is it something like global warming that threatens the health of the Earth? Or, is it the change in ideals and values that are often times existing through our ignorance and inability to recognize right from wrong? The answer is all of the above. Now, this is very important to recognize, but before that we must recognize ourselves and who we choose to become as individuals. Xingjian, takes us on a spectacular journey filled with color, taste, smell, and offers the reader an opportunity to engage with his world through his words and storytelling. The power of our imaginations come into play as we venture through the world of China. Whether we experience the bustling city of Beijing or rural wildlife preserves, we are able to picture the different aspects of Earth’s communities and societies. Throughout this journey, the narrator searches to find meaning in life after finding that he is free of lung cancer. Along the way, he experiences nature, wisdom, romance, family, and the spirit of God. His willingness to open himself up to the unknown is what allows him to continue his journey. Like the readers, his adventurous mentality enables his imagination to take hold on his inner consciousness,

recognizing and reminiscing on his life as a whole. In other words, the power of imagination can open up doors to new knowledge and satisfaction. Additionally, his infatuation with nature exemplified by, “Only a lunatic would think that art is superior to nature” (Xingjian), should help allow the reader to recognize how large the world around us truly is. We are currently stuck at home under quarantine order. While it may be a difficult time for all of us, mentally and even physically, we should recognize the fact that maybe this is a way of Earth telling us that it’s time for change. Like I said, at the end of the day we are all one interconnected society whether we like it or not. What we do and what we create shapes the future. Xingjian hits this idea right on the head, “I believe in science but I also believe in fate.” (Xingjian). It may not be immediate, it may not be in a year, but change is coming and the healing process has begun. If you go outside right now you may see more wildlife, recognize noises you may not even knew existed, feel a breeze that has never been felt before, the serenity of Earth is slowly reviving as its demise has come to a temporary halt. Some are dying in the process, but that’s a part of life. We cannot live forever and we know what precautions must be taken in order to survive during this difficult time; social distance and stay indoors. However, like we’ve seen for centuries, the ignorance of man leads to tragedy.

Helplessness does not mean there isn’t hope. I have often spoke of the human attention span and how it is continually dwindling. I see our existence as small in the grand scheme of things. We expect knowledge to be provided in the immediate, we lack the willingness to search for what lies ahead, what was before, and what can be. Now, I’m not speaking for everyone here because some share the same realization as me and actually recognize the value of being small and humble. We are one of many species living on a larger planet that still hasn’t been fully explored, in a larger galaxy, and as far as we know in an endless universe. It is rather silly to



believe that we are alone in this world. Xingjian speaks of finding your own journey throughout the novel, sharing the wisdom the narrator received from numerous sages and elderlies. When one is without meaning they become lost, but I believe we all share one meaning in some way or another. That meaning is the progression of the human race. We live in a small world in comparison to what lies beyond our atmosphere. Yes, we are “I’s” living in societies that differ based on beliefs, race, religion, and values. Yet, we learn in the novel that we are “small and insignificant like a grain of sand.” (Xingjian). Xingjian, provides us with these experiences to offer us the ability to feel vulnerable, which may seem like a daunting emotion, but unfortunately, no true answer exist. We are all “I’s” living amongst other “I’s” that have their own agenda and beliefs. Nothing can change overnight, unity cannot be bridged in a day, and ultimately miracles cannot occur without our willingness to change and trust the process.

### **Chapter 11: Walk on Water**



When we think about the ignorance of man we find ourselves thinking of protagonists like Jay Gatsby and Okonkwo. They both share a common goal to protect their homes. Gatsby’s home is found through Daisy, while Okonkwo’s is found in his village. Some people have literal

homes, houses and places of living, while others look to people to provide them with a sense of home. Even America is a place where various people with backgrounds from countries around the world long to discover or rediscover their true home. For example, a Russian immigrant may have a home in Los Angeles, California, but they claim their true home as a place in Russia. This goes for French, Italian, Armenian, Mexican, and pretty much every immigrant that has made the journey to America for a better life. That is what this country allows for and is the sole reason why it is believed to be a great nation regardless of its overwhelming issues. We all search for a better life, but are often blinded by what we cannot obtain. In other words, we live in a world where often times reality becomes a blur. When we are sleeping, daydreaming, meditating, or even staring off into the sunset, our minds begin to drift. As we float in an alternate state of consciousness we become closer to the world around us. Some people achieve this through the above-mentioned meditation and dreaming, while others turn to psychedelic drugs to enter new realms of imagination. For Xingjian, it was simple, his narrator found this euphoria through experience. He claims, "Reality exists only through experience, and it must be personal experience. However, once related, even personal experience becomes a narrative." (Xingjian). Here, the narrative he speaks of comes in numerous forms. This narrative Xingjian speaks of is all attributed to one's legacy. Let's take a look at the story of Jesus Christ for example. We all know that he supposedly was immaculately conceived by the Virgin Mary and was seen as God's son to many in the middle eastern regions of Nazareth and Bethlehem; now located in the Palestine region near the Gaza Strip. It was said that he helped cleanse people of their sins and acted as the living God in flesh and blood. In addition, recorded history tells us that he performed numerous miracles like walking on the raging waters of the Mediterranean sea, turning clear water to the most potent and delicious red wine imaginable, and even saving the helpless from

dying. Now, it is hard to know if this was true or not, but these claims are held correct for millions of people around the world. How can we know Jesus's reality and what he truly went through and did throughout his life without hearing from the man himself? Is it fair to trust the centuries old accounts of his life based upon narrative and individualistic expression? It would be much simpler to somehow travel back in time to save ourselves countless and even endless debate over the belief systems Jesus erected. Unfortunately, time travel isn't possible. With that, his legacy relies on us, the people, specifically his believers and followers that have passed on his word and actions for generations. His personal experiences have become a narrative of fact versus fiction dependent upon whether you choose to believe or not. I for one am skeptical, as everyone should be. Skepticism is a powerful tool that can enable people to find absolute truth. This mindset can help separate followers from leaders, crafting skills like America's idea for independence that contributes to making an individual stand out from the rest. The goal becomes personal in nature, it is not about believing in the black and white world, it is about finding the grey. Maybe Jesus was the Holy Trinity Catholics speak of, but in reality, it should be taken as a grain of salt. The true power and wisdom of Jesus' story can provide us is only part of the narrative but it is the most important. He preached love, compassion, and respect. If we learn to set aside the numerous belief systems that hold Jesus at the center and just look at him for the man he has been claimed to be, he sets the standard for three golden qualities of life. We should love thy neighbor, we should be compassionate and interested in not only our feelings but those around us, and above all else we must be respectful and kind towards others in order to get back positivity from the universe.

There is a game called two truths and a lie. The point of the game is to tell someone about yourself in a way that makes them think about the person you are without truly knowing you.

When I say I've never skied, I love pizza, and I play basketball, there is a lot to be learned. Our first instinct is to look at the subject at hand and ask something like, "does he look athletic?" Now, it is often times a poor choice to judge a book by its cover because it usually conjures poor judgment, however this game forces you to do so. I would eventually tell you that I have not been skiing before, indicating that I do in fact love pizza and play basketball. For Xingjian, he may tell us I love nature, I have zero doubts, I want to live. I thought he might state these three specific declarations because they all attribute towards his story. Relating back to *Soul Mountain*, the narrator is ultimately searching for a higher purpose in life, whether it is God or the answer to divine knowledge he wanders through differing locations to get a sense of humanity as a whole. This reminds me of my experience abroad. Traveling around Europe made me realize that I was more unaware of people's thoughts and outlook on life than I had initially thought. I never imagined how much pity Londoners have for us Americans when thinking about our current Commander in Chief, or how much Parisians dislike people that don't speak French. As we travel and see more of the world we become blessed with the ability of adaptation. For Xingjian's narrator, he learns that nature brings him peace and is the ultimate environment for him. Whether it's the smell of a lush lavender bush, sleek birds stretching their wings as they soar through the oceanic sky, or the slow drifting wind that plays a tune every time it whistles past your ear, he finds peace and is able to atone for his misfortunes in life. The saying God forgives seems like an outlet and scapegoat to me when looking at people's mistakes. Xingjian claims, "With the beginning of life, comes the thirst for truth, whereas the ability to lie is gradually acquired in the process of trying to stay alive." (Xingjian). This is wholeheartedly true. I often find myself searching for knowledge and the truth behind anything from the answer in a test to if a girl likes me or not. When we really look at what Xingjian is saying we find that life is

a test, not one moment goes by where we are not being tested by someone or something. For some it is God as he holds the power to forgive those of mistakes. For myself, I may seek forgiveness from others, but in reality, we must forgive ourselves in order to learn to love and accept who we are and what we will be remembered by. This is easier said than done, and we tend to lie to ourselves and others to achieve short term clarity and forgiveness. Yet, the truth always comes out. We may survive the initial day of lying, but when we find ourselves in a hole or as I like to call it the pit of despair, it is a very long way up. It is easier to tell a hurtful truth than to lie; one pain is sharp like a prick from cacti while the other is laced with poison that eats away at your soul.

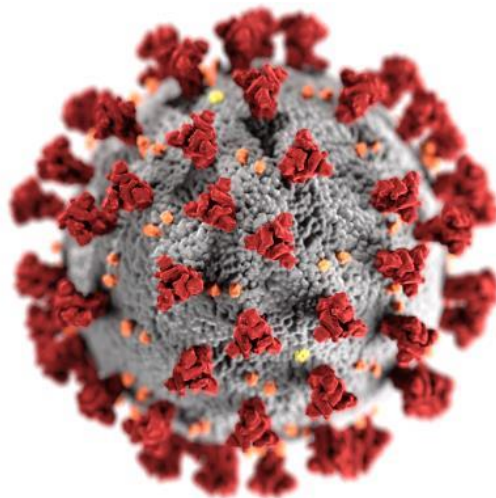
To seek out this sort of knowledge, I cannot tell you how important it is to travel. We must put ourselves in uncomfortable situations, or venture to unknown places if we want to have a proper outlook on reality. If there is ever an opportunity to travel it must be taken advantage of. Traveling does not have to be done by venturing to distant locations like Paris or London, rather traveling and tourism are states of mind. We are traveling all the time from the moments we wake up feeling unbalanced to when we take a shower, get ready, and eat a healthy breakfast that provides us with that balance. Xingjian claims, “You’ve lived in the city for a long time and need to feel that you have a hometown.” (Xingjian). I offer the contrary; his character is searching for belonging and reason which may be why he believes that stability is important for one’s soul. This may be true, but without changing environments, traveling with not only our physical self, but our spiritual and mental consciousness, we can learn a thing or two about the world around us. As we open ourselves up to opportunity and comprehension we conjure the ability to access the hidden features around us. For Xingjian’s narrator it was his ability to love nature and the ever-green lands that dwell outside the cities, untouched by the terrors and destruction of

industrialism. For me I find traveling offers me the art of thought. From places like Berlin and Barcelona I was able to reflect on my own ideals and combine them with those of others. My mind traveled to places I never thought it could and I manifested a new blueprint for my happiness, peace, and serenity. My legacy is one of progression, a progression that is not straight forward, it offers twists and turns because of change and my ability to accept and face the unknown.

The human consciousness can only comprehend so much. There is a lot to learn on this planet and not one living soul holds all the world knowledge. Like Xingjian, many have lived their life seeking absolute knowledge. I for one don't even know what that means. How can we even comprehend absolute knowledge when we don't even know how large the universe really is or how deep our oceans are. After journeying throughout China, the narrator began to realize this. From the moment the elder explained to him that we are "small and insignificant like a grain of sand" (Xingjian), to God at the end of his journey remaining silent when asked "what, then, is there left to seek if no miracles exist." (Xingjian). I'm not sure if God chose not to answer or if he did not know the answer, regardless God remained silent because the question is ignorant. We don't need miracles to give life meaning because they happen every day around us. When the sun goes down and comes back up again, when the dead plants reemerge from their graves when Spring time comes around, when a new baby is born, these are miracles in their own way. We don't need somebody to walk on water or turn water in to wine to know how special we can be as individuals. We live in a world filled of wonders and opportunity, exemplified by Xingjian, "You should know that there is little you can seek in this world, that there is no need for you to be so greedy, in the end all you can achieve are memories, hazy, intangible, dreamlike memories which are impossible to articulate. When you try to relate them, there are only sentences, the

dreps left from the filter of linguistic structures.” (Xingjian). In other words, appreciate the fact that you are alive, try new things, meet new people, craft new memories, there’s not a reason for everything we do and even if there is not everything is clear and absolute. We must accept this reality and live in the moment, enjoy what we have and try not to dread what we don’t. If this knowledge can be found along with the mindset it provides, then life can be simpler with an everlasting feeling and flavor of ecstasy.

## **Chapter 12: Fear of the Unknown**



People change. Although this may make you feel helpless, we must learn to accept the inevitable. Living in the moment is great, but we must also be fully aware of what’s going on in the world around us. This sort of double standard is complicated to achieve. For example, we may be watching an NFL football game on a beautiful Sunday afternoon. The sun is shining through the windows and our team is winning. Sounds like a good day right? While we get our entertainment, nobody thinks about the damage each player is receiving from constant collisions and enforced head trauma. We ignore the fact that the governing hierarchy is lacking those of color as well as women. I’m not saying there absolutely has to be women or minority races on

atop the NFL structure just because the league needs to be more diverse, but they can at the very least have the same opportunity as those that are white and privileged. These social issues exist each and every day, in every corner of business, and as much as it is important to realize this reality, something needs to be done about it. Look at the Corona Virus. This disease has brought drastic changes to our livelihoods, psyche, and physical body. Just as I sit here writing this piece, a CVS commercial in the background reads, “Our homes have become the concert halls, dance studios, and movie theatres”. This simple advertisement speaks to the volume and impact of the pandemic. While we are forced to stay at home in accordance to both state and federal orders, that shouldn’t stop us from forgetting the true meaning behind humanity. As we fight this invisible enemy, we are all in this together, and as cliché as that may be, it’s the truth. This is a problem the entire world is facing and there’s no denying it. We must wake up and face reality, it does us no good to deny and in turn divide the populous. I’ve said this and I’ll say it again; fear is the ultimate enemy. Fear has the power to alter our emotions and thoughts, often times causing us to perform unnatural and sporadic actions. These actions always come with a consequence and there’s no denying it. They come in many forms, whether it is consequential for those that suffer from these actions or for the actual individual who acted wrongly.

For instance, take a look at author Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*. In this short story, he describes a German man, Gregor Samsa, and his transformative crisis. One morning he wakes up from a terrible dream, only to find that he has been turned into a giant bug. Serving as the main provider for his family, he is unable to work for obvious reasons. The story takes us on a journey through the ensuing days, from getting fired from work to his family slowly conjuring resentment towards him and his ghastly new form. His sister, Grete, seems to be the only caring entity that Gregor has left along with the newly acquired maid. On the other hand, his father



views him as despicable, while his mother can't stand the sight of him. Instead of doing what a family should; finding a cure or transitioning to a solution that has Gregor fitting in to life in his new form, they disregard his pain and become enthralled in selfishness. On the other hand, Gregor displays an unrelenting motivation to remain selfless, "To spare her from even these glimpses, he dragged the sheet to the sofa on his back one day—this required four hours' work—and laid it in such a way as to conceal himself entirely, so the sister could not see him even if she stooped down." (Kafka). Here, Gregor realizes his family is disgusted by his figure and decides to conceal his identity in order to protect them from pain. This is where the fear factor kicks in. Gregor, becomes a thing of the past (I say thing because he isn't human anymore), and is left to fend for himself. All the while he seems to be proud that his hard-earned money can still be used to support his family. His family first mentality is what enables him to initially power through the isolation and eventual alienation. However, he soon comes to terms with the fact that all hope is lost. In the end, his father, out of protection for the mother, severely harms him. Before his ultimate death, he ponders his family's future, "His thoughts, full of tenderness and love, went back to his family. He was even more firmly convinced than his sister, if possible, that he should disappear." (Kafka). Instead of mourning his death, the family has felt they lost Gregor the day he was transformed. Moving on with their lives, they move out of the home in hopes of finding a better tomorrow.

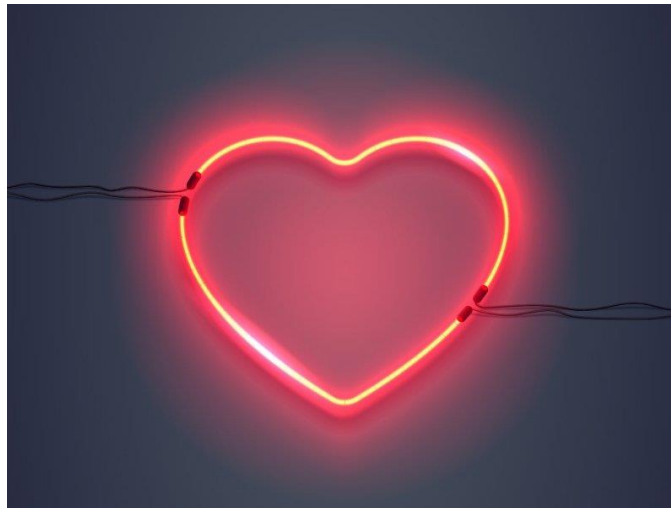
While reading this story I came to the realization that humanity and individuals' true nature come to light in times of crisis. I continue to mention fear because it's what drives irrational decisions. Reflecting on the Covid-19, I don't believe fear should be a factor at all. Yes, everyone has a right to be afraid of contracting the virus and thus possible death, but we must realize the death toll in comparison to the overall population is miniscule. Instead of living

in fear, we need to recognize the benefits of this new normal. Instead of sitting at home streaming shows and movies, we can be bettering ourselves and working on our respective crafts. For example, if you're a baseball player you can watch videos on how to have a better swing, if you're a singer you can practice your vocals, if you're trying to get a job you can continue to apply each and every day while learning the art of patience. There are so many things that people can do to better themselves instead of wallowing in their own misery and self-pity. That mentality is for the weak and I'd like to believe we are all better than people like Gregor's family, who out of selfishness chose to neglect his feelings and horrible situation. Everybody has the potential for greatness and we all must recognize our purpose in life.

We have all transformed some way or another. I for one have certainly changed both physically and emotionally. The crisis has seen me grow out my hair on my head and on my face. I haven't been able to lift the heavy weights I'm used to lifting so I have become slimmer. I have to face the reality that my college experience is over and I will no longer have a graduation; at least not for the foreseeable future. I haven't seen the majority of my friends and it has caused me a lot of frustration. SO WHAT. Yes, these are all truths in the reality we all are currently living in, but I have found alternatives that will have to do for the time being. For instance, at home workouts have enabled me to maintain my figure and keep a healthy lifestyle. I have eaten home cooked meals and stuck with my healthy diet. The only issue I've come across is the lack of cardio, but not directly due to the virus. I can still walk in my neighborhood and bike around my area; unfortunately issues with my knee have been a major setback in specific actions like running and squatting. You would think all this time at home would be enough to suffice a healthy recovery; sadly, my injury seems to need professional attention which is hard to come by if you aren't a Covid-19 patient. Even so, my rebellious nature has seen me drive to the beach,

meet up with friends in parking lots to talk through car windows, and even stand atop hills to overlook the beautiful city of Los Angeles.

### **Chapter 13: The Power of Love**



The only way to combat fear is with love. I've mentioned my rebellious nature and this is attributed to my love for friendship, nature, and my extroverted lifestyle. I don't like being at home, but while I've accepted the reality, I've found new ways to maneuver through the suggested rules. I am not afraid of this virus and I won't let it defeat me mentally or physically. This comparison may be odd, but as of now I feel like the slave trade is among us. I am a slave to this virus, not by choice, but by that of the world's governments. Although I agree with their way of handling the situation and am willingly staying home, this sort of isolationistic treatment reminds me of the Antebellum South and the Nigerian Congo. These Africans were taken from their homes and transported around the world to serve a higher power. Today, we serve this virus to protect those we love. For the Africans, they forcibly served their owners in order to someday be freed from bondage. The bond these African servants crafted among one another in order to survive and find a sliver of peace in an unwanted world makes me realize that my relationships

will remain intact and the power of love (a corny line often used in cinema) will shine through during this pandemic. This brings me to author Gabriel García's novel, *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Much like the Coronavirus, Márquez takes us on a journey of love, passion, pain, deceit, lies, death, affairs, and of course disease. Only this time the disease is used to the characters' advantage. Florentino, the main character embodies the complications of relationships. His love for Fermina is overshadowed by the temptations around us. From sexual frustrations to the protection of his own self-interests, we see the character cause more harm to himself and others around him than good. Unlike Gregor in Kafka's novel, Florentino is blinded by love much like Jay Gatsby. He is free to choose who he wants to be and who he wants to be with. Unfortunately, his lack of self-control sets him on a course of self-pity, denying him of love because of his inability to move on from his feelings for Fermina. Even when held at gun point he claims, "'Shoot me," he said, with his hand on his chest. "There is no greater glory than to die for love."(Márquez). Eventually through Fermina's love affairs, she finds a happy marriage with Doctor Urbino, even though unbeknownst to her is unfaithful. Eventually after 50 some odd years the Doctor passes, leaving Florentino the opportunity to rekindle his relationship with his true love who he vowed to claim as his own. They set course for a voyage on a ship and experience romance and happiness. Upon arrival to their last stop, Fermina explains that they cannot be seen together or she will be judged. Without hesitation he informs the captain to raise the yellow cholera flag indicating the ship is disease ridden and is not to be docked. This action leaves the captain and his lover, as well as Fermina and Florentino on an endless love boat with no point of return.

Self-isolation can be dangerous. While Kafka describes the issues of change and alienation through disease, Márquez offers the opposite. He shows that sometimes people will

act recklessly when blinded by love. The passion and lust that comes with it proves that we act irrational when we love someone. This can be in a romantic relationship or as simple as a friendship; we will do anything to protect those we love. However, in Márquez's case, Florentino is selfish rather than protective. His long-lived infatuation with Fermina causes him to make an irrational and life altering decision in a time of panic. We hate to lose the things we love and dislike change. In order to progress and let go of the past we must recognize this dangerous mindset and perform actions against our genetic code. Yes, we think and feel with our heart, but at the end of the day it is important to act on our thoughts and rational that comes deep within our minds and conscious.

#### **Chapter 14: The Man, the Myth, the Legend**



At this point in our journey we have reached the pinnacle of my knowledge. I have provided you with countless stories and ideas that attribute to the power of searching for the unknown, taking a step out of our comfort zones, and realizing the evils that exist around us. Now, although and relating back to the idea that one man cannot change the world, one man can certainly represent a multitude of souls. "That guy is such a character". I love the word

“character”, and whenever I use it to describe somebody I usually say it because the person infatuates me. It can be somebody who is silly and makes me laugh, or somebody mysterious and sly, either way they are nothing short of interesting. Throughout this quarantine I have been watching a ton of TV shows and movies. My notable favorites have been the classic Western *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*, HBO’s hit mob series *The Soprano ’s*, and Showtime’s staple series *Homeland*. These shows are so intriguing because of the characters they have produced. People like Blondie, Tony Soprano, and Carrie Mathison are the souls that embody the screen. The actors playing them are so convincing that you truly believe they serve as their personal alter egos. It’s almost as if these characters are their personal superhero identities like a Batman or Flash who put on a mask in order to conceal their true selves from the public. Without a fascinating character, a story would be pointless no matter how remarkable it may be. Look at periods in history like the civil rights movement or America’s fight for independence. George Washington and Martin Luther King Jr. were the protagonists, playing central roles in the overall theme of their respective stories. For our journey, one particular character that stands out to me is Jay Gatsby.

“Well hello old sport”. This is Gatsby’s trademark line, he always refers to others as “old sport” to display his savvy and eccentric mannerisms as well as his glorified and luxurious lifestyle that he embodies as an individual. He is the walking, living luxury man that is admired by others for all of his riches. However, while this may be the reality on the surface level, Gatsby is a multilayered man that must be peeled over and over again like an orange that is not quite yet ripe.

Respect is hard to come by. For Gatsby, he seems to be a man that garners respect from everyone he comes across. A man of many treasures he lives the life of a celebrity atop his castle

like a mansion fit for a King. If he were to take a journey through Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between The World and Me*, we would find a few notable similarities. Coates talks of the journey black folks have and continue to endure. I see Gatsby as Coates or even Thomas Mann's Gustav in his novel *Death in Venice*. While Gatsby's love interest, Daisy Buchanan, serves as Coates' son, Samori, Mann's Tazio also plays this roll perfectly. In some ways Gatsby is naïve and innocent like Samori; in need of a reality check and subjective education. However, when pondering the idea, "Black people love their children with a kind of obsession." (Coates), we can clearly identify the parallels attributed to Gatsby's obsession for Daisy. Yes, Coates is a successful author and can provide for his son, yes Gatsby can buy the entire world if he wanted, but nothing can fulfill their lives more than the idea of protecting their loved ones. The world could end, riches could be lost, but at the end of the day the emptiness of a home is incomparable to that of one's heart. In the words of Gustav, "If I get the virus then so be it". (Mann). Death does not eliminate the power of eternal love.

But how does one gain true power? Love can only accomplish so much. Unfortunately, I don't think anybody knows the answer to that question. Some have certain methods that work, but absolute power can never be achieved. We are not immortal so eventually our power will go to the grave with us. Yes, some live on through their legacy in the form of a business or corporate name, however as time goes by that one great and notable power will eventually reach its demise. Look at the Romans, their empire expanded as far west as Africa and as far East as Asia. They conquered countless nations and achieved victory through sheer force and intellectual dominance. Now, all that remains are memories written in a book or viewable through architecture, art, and societal norms. So, maybe that means the Roman Empire did have some sort of immortality attached to it, evident in the existence of Democracy. Regardless, the

physical form of empires has never lasted forever. Gatsby knows this all too well. Born to an unknown father and mother his life was set up for failure. Similar to Joseph Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, and his description of black people in society, "This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish." (Baldwin). Gatsby knew that he needed to break the rules in order to find salvation. Only he never knew he'd become the absurdly rich man he is. His unrelenting drive and passion for Daisy's love allowed him to establish his empirical reign over the bootlegging business; an illegal alcohol operation during the prohibition era. He was a mobster, a bootlegger, a criminal, but at heart he was just a lonely being, searching for meaning in life.

Nothing lasts forever. As I previously mentioned, Empires are doomed from the start. The invisible clock that ticks and tocks will eventually reach zero. It has no sense of time, but the mechanism within it eventually wears out. Jesmyn Ward knows this to be true for black people in her novel *The Fire This Time*. She reiterates this idea through her experience as a black woman in society, "there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black" (Ward). For Gatsby, he lives a similar life, on edge and in need of protection. He knows that living the life of a criminal comes at a cost. One day business can be thriving, but in the blink of an eye his life can be taken away from him. This brings me to the importance of loved ones. Without a better half or someone to care for you, money can't fill the void of emotions. Additionally, sinful men tend to be forgotten. We see this play out in both Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Both describe instances of death and how quickly others can move on from tragedy. Conrad describes the mentality of men when those of evil die, "They, no doubt, like the rest of us, found what they deserved." (Conrad). Similarly, we see Achebe describe the



violent nature of mankind that Gatsby is subjected to at the end of his story, “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.” (Achebe). Again, and back to the idea of Empires, when things go wrong, nobody is safe. Even the people with the most power that are deemed untouchable become exposed to the reality of death, failure, and their eventual termination.

Coming back to the ideas both Baldwin and Ward presented when referring to the damnation of black folks, author Mario Vargas Llosa describes his idea of belongingness in his novel *The Dream of a Celt*. “When in Liverpool with his cousins, Roger sometimes conquered his timidity. (Llosa). Here we see the power of comfortability. As mentioned before, Gatsby was born without a proper identity, or at least with one he didn’t particularly care for. He was never content with the person he wanted or even needed to be. He realized that he needed to learn more and eventually found himself at sea, visiting places abroad that along with his mentor who taught him everything he knew, exposed him to new ideas and lifestyles. He used this to his advantage, crafting a new personality and mantra that embodied the person he would eventually become. However, this path can lead to the exposure of one’s weaknesses.

Although Gatsby lives in a grand home with luxurious items, it is evident that it was all a façade. Like Jean-Paul Sartre’s *No Exit*, Gatsby lives his life in a sort of purgatory, hosting extravagant parties every night, while conducting his business during the day. However, unlike the damned souls in Sartre’s story, Gatsby exemplifies the idea that “Man is what he wills himself to be.” (Satre). Gatsby chose this life of luxury to impress those around him, particularly Daisy. He hoped that one day she would walk into one of his parties, see him for the successful man he had become, and eventually offer her love in return. Whether this is selfless or not is one thing, but we can be certain that his success is fueled by love. Author Franz Kafka displays the

power of one's love in his story *Metamorphosis*. The main character is transformed, much like Gatsby is transforms himself into the successful bootlegger. Out of selflessness, "His thoughts, full of tenderness and love, went back to his family." (Kakfa). Gatsby never really cared much for the materialistic items or monetized belongings, he always looked out for those that helped him or who he truly cared for. Daisy and his friend Nick Carraway were often frustrated by his actions, but at the end of the day he always offered his care and gratitude. Sure, he may have been selfish at times and blinded by his search for love, but deep down he was a caring individual who wanted the best for those around him.

To achieve success and establish a legacy, sometimes people take risks that come at the cost of others. Gatsby found his success through criminal activity. Along with the people he aligned himself with it was evident that "People have become corrupt everywhere. You can search in vain for justice or true morality. They no longer exist." (Saadawi). Author Nawal El Saadawi writes of this idea in his story *God Dies By The Nile*. No matter what people believe in, whether it's money, power, or some sort of God, humanity has become corrupted by the search for the unknown. We are blinded by the fact that we believe success comes in the form of money or in the form of God's power, when in reality success comes when we offer selflessness to those in need or by making the world around us a better place. Don't get me wrong, Gatsby tried to give Daisy a better life, but the cost of his success was too great to conquer. He was in search of the "she" similarly to an idea presented in author Gao Xingjian's *Soul Mountain*. "When a man gets to middle age shouldn't he look for a peaceful and stable existence, find a not-too-demanding sort of a job, stay in a mediocre position, become a husband and a father, set up a comfortable home, put money in the bank and add to it every month so there'll be something for old age and a little left over for the next generation." (Xingjian). I truly believe this is something

Gatsby was trying to obtain, he wanted to settle down with Daisy and find peace for himself so he no longer had to suffer from the stresses of the real world. Instead of Xingjian's idea of "I" and the search for miracles, Gatsby had it all until the sins of his past eventually caught up to him. His tragedy is one of Shakespearean nature, and his inevitable death at the hand of a man who killed him for a crime he did not commit, was in reality both a metaphorical and actual bullet taken in order to protect Daisy's future. Love truly kills.

### **Food for Jay Gatsby:**

#### **Champagne & Hors d'oeuvres: Luxury**



#### **Eggs: Layers**



#### **Macaroons: Love & Affection**



**Unripe Orange: Gatsby****Chapter 15: The 7 Senses**

Gatsby had the sense of accomplishing his goals by any means necessary. However, he was often times unaware of the beauty around him. So, who are we without our senses? Black folk have the sense for equality, America has the sense for power. Dogs, cats, humans, and even sharks all have senses. In fact, every living thing on this planet have intellects that allow for survival in the vast landscape of mother Earth. The seven senses that are achievable by humans relate closely to my personal experience during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as stories like *The Great Gatsby*, that touch on things like visual and auditory reflexes that are only visible in our minds. The power of written word allows us to travel to different dimensions, time periods, and other worlds that we may have not ever thought to be imaginable. That is the great thing about books, dependent upon the reader, some may view a certain piece one way, while others

offer a completely different opinion. I told you I am not much of a reader, but if you commit to reading you can find that there is no need to travel around the world when experience can be gained through stories. We can almost hear and see the vivid colors of Jay Gatsby's extravagant parties, or the eerie depths of the Congo Jungle in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Without the combination of our imaginations and sensory capabilities, written word would be very dull and boring. However, a good writer always finds a way to conjure smells, taste, and other feelings that contribute to the story. In reality all we can touch and feel are the numerous paper pages that we flip through until the end of the book. On the other hand, our minds tend to drift off into the pages, finding a link between the human touch and the words of the author.

Poems, as short as they may be in comparison to novels, often tell us more about ourselves than we realize in just a few short lines. For each of the seven sensory systems I have selected poems that I thought in some ways display their meaning.

Proprioception, Vestibular, Tactile & Auditory: *Heartbeats* by Melvin Dixon



Work out. Ten laps.  
Chin ups. Look good.

Steam room. Dress warm.  
Call home. Fresh air.

Eat right. Rest well.  
Sweetheart. Safe sex.

Sore throat. Long flu.  
Hard nodes. Beware.

Test blood. Count cells.  
Reds thin. Whites low.

Dress warm. Eat well.  
Short breath. Fatigue.

Night sweats. Dry cough.  
Loose stools. Weight loss.

Get mad. Fight back.  
Call home. Rest well.

Don't cry. Take charge.  
No sex. Eat right.

Call home. Talk slow.  
Chin up. No air.

Arms wide. Nodes hard.  
Cough dry. Hold on.

Mouth wide. Drink this.  
Breathe in. Breathe out.

No air. Breathe in.  
Breathe in. No air.

Black out. White rooms.  
Head hot. Feet cold.

No work. Eat right.  
CAT scan. Chin up.

Breathe in. Breathe out.  
No air. No air.

Thin blood. Sore lungs.  
Mouth dry. Mind gone.

Six months? Three weeks?  
Can't eat. No air.

Today? Tonight?  
It waits. For me.

Sweet heart. Don't stop.  
Breathe in. Breathe out.

Dixon describes the life of a human heart and what it goes through each and every day. To begin, when we achieve silence we are able to hear our hearts; the inner organ inside us that keeps us alive with every beat. The poem displays the same title, *Heartbeats*, because it is the first sound we hear in our mothers' wounds and it is the last sound we hear before the beat stops. Our lives are like a song, some are longer than others with numerous flows and speeds, but they all have the same humming ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum. We must be mindful of our health, dedicating ourselves to working out, staying fit, and feeding our bodies with the essentials. This allows us to achieve equilibrium, contributing to both the proprioception and vestibular senses. These aren't the original five sense, but serve as the six and seventh. They are no less important than the others as they both find roots within a strong heart that allows for a healthy overall body. We see the poem describe the importance of balance which contributes to the vestibular sense. Continually, we see the physical side of the human take form in "safe sex" (Dixon) and "work out" (Dixon). Both activities call for a multitude of body positions and movements that coincide with the muscles, joints, and neurons between them. The body works as one, without one sense, the other must compensate for that loss.

Visual & Olfactory: *American History* by Michael S. Harper



Those four black girls blown up  
in that Alabama church  
remind me of five hundred  
middle passage blacks,  
in a net, under water  
in Charleston harbor  
so *redcoats* wouldn't find them.  
Can't find what you can't see  
can you?

Although Harper's story doesn't directly tell us or describe any real senses, I can only imagine that reading these 9 short lines over and over again drills an unwanted image into our minds. Even without any real-life experiences that have to do with death or tragedy, we are constantly exposed to movies, tv shows, and video games that display violence. We also read about constant tragedy available to us on the news each day. Imagine four black girls blown up in a church no less, a place of peacefulness and serenity. How could a place that stresses no



violence be the sight of a catastrophe? As I think about this event I can imagine the guts and red blood spilled throughout. “Can’t find what you can’t see” (Harper) contributes to the visual sense. Criminals always try to get rid of evidence or hide themselves from the accuser. One way to achieve this is by literally blowing away the evidence. Who knows why these black girls were blown up. Maybe out of hate or maybe because of plain evil that happened to find itself within a holy spotlight. When we read further, “middle passage blacks” (Harper), we find the hate that resonated from the revolutionary war. Slave trade was a time that displayed all of the senses, many of which were very sensitive to tap into. For example, the eyes became pained by whip marks and hung bodies swaying from trees in Abel Meeropol’s *Strange Fruit*, a sight that no human should have to witness. Harper’s short poem allows the reader to fill the gaps and relate to other stories that contribute to his overall message. We can smell, hear, and feel, but at the end of the day if we cannot see, it is up to our imagination and past experiences to craft an image in our minds of the actual situation at hand.

*Strange Fruit* by Abel Meeropol



Southern trees bear strange fruit,

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant south,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,  
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

If you hadn't noticed the theme around each poem I presented you with then I'll be happy to reveal the secret. These poems describe the life and history of black men and women. "Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze" (Meeropol), describes the sites of lynching in the Antebellum South. The smell of dead human corpses spread throughout the lands, serving as a warning for blacks to behave or suffer the consequence. They were unwelcomed then and are still till this day looked down upon as less than. But how can they be less than? The other two poems, *America History and Heartbeats* are both written by black men. These treasured pieces serve to remind us how far black folks have come throughout America's history. Suffering tragedies left and right, unable to attend schools or gain an education, they pursued through the

tribulations to acclimate to American society. They had the sense that they were worth more than the white man made them out to be. They saw blood, smelled flesh, felt pain, heard screams, but through it all became stronger and more dedicated to achieving victory.

## Finale



As we near our end, it is hard to imagine words like religion, politics, race, and even death have various similarities. Still, these are all contributing factors of a specific entity's legacy, and serve to implement an opinionated staple on the topic. America is a young country. It's a country of opportunity, military strength, and freedoms that many places around the world don't offer. You're able to live a life where free will still exists and it's up to you to make something of yourself. That's the power of consumerism; all for one, one for all. Unfortunately, this has led to a large divide that continues to threaten the future of our nation. But is it a threat, or is it a wakeup call that we are in dire need of? Earlier I mentioned the term "great". Now, when we look at America on a surface level we see it as the land of freedom and opportunity. However, after all I've just said I find it hard to believe that it is truly as great as it is made out to

be. We are supposed to be the country that sets the example for other nations to follow. Yet, we still have gun violence that is out of control and somehow failed to properly prepare for the COVID-19 pandemic. This sort of arrogance is why the writings of 20th century authors are still relevant. There hasn't been any real change, the same problems still exist at this countries core and it is a shame. Yes, I am very fortunate to have been born here. I've received health care all my life, an amazing education, a roof over my head, I never struggle to have food on my plate, and I can travel to anywhere in the world (given expenses and timing) because I am an American citizen. Those are some benefits of living in this country and trust me, I do not take them for granted. Having said that, third world problems still exist within our boarders. There comes a time in life where difficult decisions may arise; it is up to the people involved to rally around a common idea or against a common enemy to find a proper way forward. But, this isn't World War II. Nazi Germany and the Japanese Empire are long gone. Yes, we still have conflicts with Russia and various countries in the Middle East, but our domestic issues should be taken care of first. How can we expect to solve the never-ending wars abroad that are truly out of our control, when we can't even solve the unemployment issue that has left countless individuals without jobs or any way to support their families? This is evident in the topics I've covered from sexism to racism, and as far as I'm concerned, our leaders need to serve the people's needs rather than their own agenda. The American political and social structure is damaged, let's be real and honest with ourselves. Many of its citizens still have the mindset of 19<sup>th</sup> century slave owners, our politicians still believe in concepts like imperialism no matter who it affects or what it divides, and at the end of the day as long as America is feared and still holds power in the world spectrum, nothing will change.

My hope is to live a long and prosperous life that coincides with change in America. As I age I hope America becomes more matured; taking a stand on all of these issues I've discussed. Let's end racism, separate church and state, and finally think about the people first. America doesn't need to be made great again, it's already great, nor does it need a revolutionary change in the immediate. It just needs to be refined, and set up for an evolutionary change. Like any species it takes time to adapt to the current environment it lives in. Only, America needs to find a way to not only live, but thrive, thrive in a way that proves it has changed according to the year 2020. This is supposed to be the future, a place that sci-fi writers predicted would have technological advancements that were unheard of. Well, these advancements do exist, we have the capability of flying to mars, the capability to speak with someone face to face that is halfway across the world, and even cars that run on electricity. These are all part of what makes America so important on the world spectrum. This is the legacy that America needs to be remembered by, not something like "the negro" problem.

So, what is America, or rather who is America? Is it white, black, men, women, or is it one in the same. Until these labels are seen and heard with a blind mindset, prejudice is erased from the equation, and hate evaporates into darkness where it belongs, America's legacy will always be tarnished by its history and the inability to recognize the need for change at a productive rate. Like the once thriving Roman Empire; America is headed on a course towards an eventual demise. Now, it is up to us to expel the rust from the countries inherent joints and set it on a path filled with equality, peace, and bliss for all.

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