

A **POLITICS** **OF LOVE**

A HANDBOOK FOR A NEW AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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REVIEWING THE PLOT

You can't pick up a novel in the middle of the book and have any idea what's going on. You don't know the characters and you don't know the plot. You need to read it from the beginning to know how the story unfolds.

The same is true with the story of a nation. We can't really understand what's going on in this country without understanding where we've come from. We can't recognize forces for what they represent historically when all we can see is how they relate to us now. With almost every issue, what happens now is part of a continuing narrative that began over two hundred years ago. Issues erupting dramatically today have been developing for years, often underneath the surface, as generation after generation writes its chapter in our ongoing history.

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Whether you're learning the history of your family or the history of your ethnic group or religion, knowing where you come from gives you a clue into who you are. It's difficult to understand what it means to be an American today without understanding what America means, period.

Yet what America means is open to interpretation. To some people, America means a bright spot of freedom and liberty whose shadows and mistakes are secondary to the exceptionalism of our first principles. To them, our country is so good that it hardly matters what we've done wrong. To others, it seems America's historical errors justify perpetual condemnation. To them, at times we've been so bad that it hardly matters what we've ever done right. We won't be led through the storm of this moment, either by those who love this country blindly or by those who condemn her blindly. For the blind cannot see.

The guiding light of America's destiny is neither blind to our problems nor blind to our potential. We will be led through our current storm by the inner light of a more sophisticated, compassionate understanding that America is a continuing narrative. Like any of us, it isn't a finished product yet. Nor will it ever be. A nation is continuously moving through time, like a novel whose ending can't be foreseen. What we need now is a deeper understanding of what came before, and a deeper commitment among us to write well the chapter that is ours.

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Today, we seem tethered neither to where we came from nor to where we wish to be going. We've lost the plot of our democracy—we're not connecting the dots, and we're not connecting the dots because we're not connecting the facts. We're not connecting the facts because the facts have been scrambled.

Our founders sought safeguards against such scrambling, but the safeguards have been weakened. Thomas Jefferson wanted free public education because only people whose critical thought processes had been honed could be entrusted with the power of self-governance. And he wanted a free press to make sure all citizens had the information we would need in order to make wise decisions. If you're entrusted with the power to direct a country—which, in a representative democracy, we the people are—then you need to be educated in order to know how to think, and informed by a free press in order to know what to think. On both fronts, however, our power has been diminished.

Someone knew exactly what they were doing when American civics and history lessons started disappearing from many public school curricula. In eleven states, there is no required civics or American history education at all. In more than half of them, no more than half a year learning those subjects is required. But if someone didn't learn about the Bill of Rights when they were a child, how would they know to be appalled as an adult when they see it under assault?

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Knowledge is power, and withholding knowledge is a tool of all oppressive systems. Underresourcing education, particularly among children, and corporate consolidation of the news media have been powerful tools in the dumbing down of the American mind. Without an informed and passionate citizenry, democracy is not a problem for its enemies at all.

Giving people a lot of consumer products but not giving them information is like giving people lots of candy but withholding basic nourishment. Perhaps if you give people a way to make more money, they won't notice that you've taken away something even more precious. If you legitimize their self-centeredness, they'll be more likely to forget about their ancestors, their fellow citizens, or their descendants.

One of the most powerful things an American citizen can do today is read up on American history, a lot of which most of us don't remember from school and many of us never even learned. There are enough "American History for Dummies"-type books out there that no one really has much of an excuse for not brushing up on our nation's history. We gain a deeper understanding of the present when we have a context that includes the past, and a deeper understanding of who *we* are when we know who came before.

The more we understand the larger narrative of our history and the chapters that were written by other generations, the more empowered we are in writing our own. We learn, among

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other things, that many of the forces we're dealing with now are simply the latest iterations of challenges that have been with us from the beginning. The current crisis in our country is the continuation of a narrative that began over two hundred years ago.

The first historical through-line is our foundational democratic principles, the values on which we purport to stand. Inscribed in our Declaration of Independence in 1776, these first principles are the light that guides us through every travail: that all men are created equal; that God gave all men unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and that governments are instituted to secure those rights. Along with those unalienable rights go freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to bear arms, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom to protest, and several more meant to ensure our ability to remain a free people. Another fundamental American principle was articulated by Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address: that “government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Those ideas are not just abstract concepts. They are living, breathing forces for which hundreds of thousands of people have struggled, lived, and died. Every one of them represents a freedom in the absence of which every American would live a very different life.

But a second through-line has also been with us from the beginning, and that is a fierce resistance to those first princi-

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ples on the part of those who see them as threatening to their interests. Usually, though not always, such forces represent the economic interests of the few pitted against the interests of the many.

So on one hand, we're a nation "conceived in liberty"; on the other hand, our entire Southern economy was based on the slave trade and it took the Civil War to end it. On the one hand, we believe in the "unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; on the other hand, we perpetrated the genocide, forced migration, and cultural annihilation on the Native peoples of this continent. On the one hand, we believe that "all men are created equal"; on the other hand, institutionalized white supremacy and segregation raged throughout the South for a hundred years even after the end of the Civil War. That dichotomy represents a dramatic, often tragic pattern that has been with us from the beginning: we were founded on enlightened principles, have in many ways ourselves been the most violent perpetrators against them, and then ultimately—at least most of the time—have reclaimed them.

Slavery was met with abolition, suppression of women was met with the suffragette movement, segregation was met with the civil rights movement, and so forth. Every generation of Americans has included both enemies of democracy and heroes of democracy. Our generation is even now in the midst of deciding which one, in our time, will prevail.

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Political manifestations, both good and bad, are but outer reflections of internal realities. They emerge from realms beyond what the eye can see. Love and lovelessness are constantly duking it out, in our hearts and in our world. Slavery, oppression, racism, and so forth are more than mere political wrongs; they represent spiritual malfunctions. Until we deal with our problems on the level from which they emerge, then no matter what we do to solve them, they will simply morph into other forms. Whether it is a health problem or a money problem or a relationship problem or a political problem, both the source of any problem and the source of its solution lie within our consciousness.

That is why a new American revolution is a revolution of consciousness, and a new American politics is a politics of love. If the choice to love remains merely a private decision, then it will have only private effects. Only when love is applied to public issues will it then have public effects.

An overly secularized, rationalistic politics is an inadequate response to the challenges of our time. A politics of love is a twenty-first-century, whole-person politics that speaks to both external and internal issues.

External activism fosters a different way of doing things, which is important. But internal activism fosters a different way of thinking about those things as well. Both are important, because everything we do is infused with the conscious-

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ness with which we do it. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, “The end is inherent in the means.” Enlightenment is a shift in worldview, and only a more enlightened thinking can deliver us to an enlightened world.

America’s founders were products of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, during which Western civilization overthrew the mystification of early church dogma in favor of rational thought and individual freedom. Today, we are entering a new Era of Enlightenment, in which we are overthrowing the limits of overly rationalistic thinking that doesn’t recognize the powers of the soul. We are evolving beyond a twentieth-century worldview that posited the world as one big machine, and realizing that in fact it is more like one big thought. Consciousness is no longer deemed irrelevant to human affairs, but rather the driver of human affairs. Things in the outer world are merely effects created by thoughts we think. The role of consciousness in transforming events is the essential realization of a twenty-first-century worldview. Only if we rethink the world will we be able to recreate it. Only in transforming our hearts will we be able to transform the world.

A political mind-set mired in twentieth-century thinking is incapable of solving our most pressing problems, because its focus on externalities too often leaves their causes unaddressed. It waters the leaves but not the roots of our democracy. Not ev-

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ery force that is driving our world is visible to the physical eye. A politics that gives little credence to the inner life, considering it outside the purview of its analysis, is inadequate to the task of navigating these difficult times.

That is why the spiritual seeker is important to the transformation of our politics, and of our country. Spiritual seekers have always been the harbingers of political change in America—the abolitionist movement was started by the early Evangelicals and Quakers, and the civil rights movement was led by a Baptist preacher. Jews and Catholics have been central to the unfoldment of every social justice movement throughout our history.

In the words of Plato, “To philosophize and do politics are one and the same thing.” Not only does enlightened politics require spiritual understanding, but enlightened spirituality requires attention to politics. No serious religious path gives anyone a pass on addressing the suffering of other sentient beings. The idea that we can leave politics out of our conceptualization of our spiritual journey is an outdated concept, because politics is simply the journey we take together. We can’t transform our country without transforming our politics, and that we can do only by participating. Standing on the sidelines is not an option for a conscious seeker, or for a conscious citizen. Too much blood and too much suffering result from an unconscious politics for those of us who claim to be on

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the journey of higher consciousness to ignore. We must take a fundamental step forward in re-creating the world from the inside out.

“Love each other” is not just a prescription for personal salvation; it is a prescription for political renewal as well.

When tens of millions of people trapped in economic shackles with little dignity, few prospects, and little hope are then told by a political candidate that the system is rigged against them and only he can fix it, you can’t just blame the candidate for taking advantage of all that hopelessness. The larger responsibility lies with a political establishment that allowed such mass despair to develop in the first place—and with those of us who allowed it to.

Economic despair is not a statistic in the lives of people who are living with it; it is a real, devastating human experience. It is a festering wound from which other symptoms emanate, such as domestic violence, opioid addiction, sickness, bad health from lack of access to care, depression, suicide, and a general breakdown of community and culture.

In a country dominated by a political system that has been dedicated more to its campaign donors than to its people, and more to the financial gain of the wealthy .01 percent of its population than to the actual practice of democracy, the crisis we now have on our hands was almost inevitable. A massive cry of economic despair was going to make itself heard—whether

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in support of a progressive populist such as Bernie Sanders, or an authoritarian populist such as Donald Trump. It's not that either of them necessarily had better plans for dealing with all that suffering than did Hillary Clinton; it's just that they're the only two candidates who *acknowledged* all that suffering. And that made all the difference.

Having substituted obeisance to the dictates of market forces for obeisance to the dictates of democratic and humanitarian concerns, the political establishment is reaping now what it has sowed. Climate change has reached extreme and dangerous levels because the US government has done more to advocate for the short-term maximization of profits to the fossil fuel and chemical companies than to advocate for the well-being of our citizens and our planet; our tax policies do more to fill the coffers of the 1 percent than to address the economic struggles of the 99 percent; and our efforts to protect national security center on increased preparedness for war yet diminished efforts at waging long-term peace. All of those factors represent more than a political challenge; they represent dire threats, over the long run, to our democracy and quite possibly to the very existence of our species.

Such problems represent something deeper and more fundamental than a system dedicated to externalities has any idea how to fix. They are reflections of the fact that, in the words of Gandhi, "humanity is not in its right mind."

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A lack of love is the level of the problem, and a lack of love is the level of the solution. Only when we realign our politics with our deep universal values will the forces arrayed against us fade away. In the words of Albert Einstein, “The problems of the world will not be solved on the level of thinking we were at when we created them.”

Political issues are *moral* issues. War and peace are moral issues. Economic injustice is a moral issue. Mass incarceration is a moral issue. Unfair tax laws are a moral issue. Racial inequality is a moral issue. Breaking treaties with Native tribes is a moral issue. The neglect of America’s children is a moral issue. Global poverty is a moral issue. A self-perpetuating war machine is a moral issue. Putting immigrants in cages is a moral issue.

The question is not simply what we should *do* about such problems. The larger question is, *Who are we* that such problems even exist among us? And who do we have to become in order to solve them?

Whether for an individual or for a nation, every crisis comes with two things: a reflection of who we have been, and an invitation to become who we need to become. And that is where America is now. We need to reach for higher ground than that on which we’ve been standing over the last few decades. Nothing less will heal our country.

Separating politics from the deeper questions of our humanity leaves us dangerously fractured as a civilization. Amer-

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ica needs to atone for some mistakes of our past and make serious amends. We need to be willing to do things differently moving forward. And we need to take a brutally honest look at how certain concepts left over from the late twentieth century do more to corrode than to advance our democracy. A new kind of American—a new kind of thinker and a new kind of citizen—needs to arise now.

And quickly.

We the People, We the Problem

For too many decades, Americans have been chronically distracted by less important things, not bothering to engage in serious self-examination. Material progress has become our false god.

While private morality might have thrived among individuals, issues of public morality began to wither. Economic values have taken precedence over ethical values, and now we're having to face the consequences of this moral corrosion. An amoral economic system, in which a corporate bottom line is given precedence by our government over considerations of who or what gets hurt, has corroded our nation's politics. And the symptoms are everywhere. Wealth inequality, racial and criminal injustice, the undue influence of money on our government, the desecration of our environment, the destruction of nonindustrial farming, compromised food and water supplies, opioid addiction, lack of educational and economic opportunity for the many while a tiny few are made richer every day—all were wounds given a chance to fester while too many of us weren't looking, weren't even complaining about the problem if it didn't apply to us.

Politicians who tried to warn us of what was happening were typically viewed as “too negative,” and journalists whose job is

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to inform us about what's happening were too often owned by the very forces that drove this systematic selling-off of our collective good. Once a few corporate conglomerates were allowed to own the majority of our news outlets (i.e., the term *corporate media*), stories that once might have earned someone a Pulitzer for good investigative journalism began just as likely to get the journalist fired.

The main organizing principle of American society today is not democracy; it is short-term profit maximization of multinational corporations. Our government does not now function to protect its citizens from overreach by corporations, so much as it works to protect corporations from all those pesky citizens who keep demanding that their rights be respected.

Democracy is not the enemy of an amoral economic system; it's simply *inconvenient* to an amoral economic system. The thieves who stole the treasures of our democracy—a thriving middle class, accessible health care, a robust educational system, and proper environmental stewardship—didn't use brute force to knock down the door. No, they used the soft, insidious power of political propaganda that no seriously thinking person should have fallen for. Yet too many of us were not serious. Too many of us were not thinking. The American people have been played for fools.

As early as the 1980s, the causes of many of our deepest problems were sold as good economic policy. Plans were laid

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for an economic reversion to what is basically an aristocratic system; “trickle-down economics” hailed as our economic salvation when in fact it created all manner of entitlement for the few and all manner of misery for the many. It did not uplift our middle class; quite to the contrary, it destroyed our middle class: from workers losing their jobs when corporations got tax breaks for moving their factories overseas to farmers being pushed off their land so agribusiness could take over to mental health care facilities being closed all over the country to attacks on unions, stealing from the middle class in order to give more to the rich was actually sold as good economic policy. Over and over we’ve elected those whose policies exalt the profits of corporations over the well-being of our citizens. Just enough of the serfs were allowed to get rich themselves, you see. What a clever sleight of hand prevailed.

The wealth inequality in America today has led to what is essentially a new class of aristocrats and a new class of serfs. In the richest nation on earth, roughly 40 percent of our citizens now have a hard time covering their basic costs, from food and health care to transportation and rent. Sixty-two percent of Americans cannot be deemed members of the middle class. Millions of Americans have to work at two or three low-wage jobs just to make ends meet. And in issues ranging from justice to education to health care to environmental protection, the underlying cancer of unbridled corporate influ-

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ence on political campaigns is poisoning the very roots of our democracy.

In the words of the late Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis, “We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we cannot have both.”

The “few” in this context are made up mainly of large corporate interests, for whom government now, for all intents and purposes, primarily functions. Their flood of undue financial influence—especially since the Supreme Court *Citizens United* decision removed restrictions on their donations to campaign coffers—is now so great as to chronically and systematically override the will of the American people. Author Jane Mayer refers to this nefarious phenomenon as “dark money.”

Like addicts coming out of denial, no longer thinking that they can control their drinking or drugging, Americans need to get out of our denial regarding the depth of corruption that prevails within our political establishment. Such a moment of clarity can be frightening at first, but it’s also a moment when breakthroughs occur. It opens the mind to the possibility that there might be another way. And there *is* another way. That way is not to disparage our democracy, but to reclaim it, rebuild it, and return it to its deepest principles. It is ultimately our emotional connection to democracy, and our devotion to the possibilities it creates for the human race, that will empower us to save it.

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Democracy is important because it is a conduit for the will and the wisdom of the people ourselves. If we lose sight of that internal value, then we lose the light that guides us. And that light is not mere symbol; it is the power of enlightened thought. “Through the night with the light from above” from the song “God Bless America” is not just a lyrical phrase. America is experiencing a dark night of the soul now, and we need our light—our wisdom, and our love—to guide us. For in the words of Abraham Lincoln, “We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth.”

Reclaiming Our Revolutionary Spirit

The United States was born of the courage and commitment to start something new. We're always starting new things, whether it's new projects, new businesses, or new versions of ourselves. That is an upside to who we are.

The very founding of our country established a new possibility for humanity, repudiating an aristocratic system and starting over on an entirely new philosophical foundation. To Europeans at the time, we were called “the New World.”

The Old World was based on social inequality, and the New World, at least in theory, was to be based on social equality. The very idea of such a radical departure from the past was revolutionary. In the words of Thomas Paine in 1776, “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.”

According to an ancient monarchical system, a king, a queen, and their cronies, the aristocracy, had been deemed entitled to land, education, wealth, wealth-creation, and all other means necessary to actualize their dreams. No one else was so entitled. No one else could own land, get an education, or create wealth for themselves. An aristocratic system gave power to those at the top—and only those at the top—to be shared with those below only at their will. According to “the divine right of kings,” God shared His power only with a king,

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who could then use the power to lord over people at will.

With the founding of the United States, God wasn't seen to have given power to a king with which to rule over us; He was seen to have given power to the people with which to govern ourselves. Governments were established to secure our rights, and we were given constitutional authority to redress our government if it failed to do so.

That's why the very notion that all men are created equal was—and remains—so radical. An entirely new political possibility emerged from the *idea* of equality. The American Dream has never been a fully actualized reality; forty-one signers of the Declaration of Independence themselves owned slaves. But the power of the American Dream lies in the power of a *possibility*, a possibility never yet fully embodied on the material plane, but one that has lived on in the imagination, hopes, and aspirations of generation after generation.

When the behavior of our government is out of sync with the rights of the American people, then it's in the finest American tradition to protest our government and seek redress. American citizens aren't here to be good boys and girls, to do as we're told, to just go along to get along. We were born of an audacious spirit, and that audacity runs in our veins even now.

We were founded by revolution, and have been sustained by minirevolutions ever since. And now it is time for another one. It is our responsibility, to ourselves and to our children,

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to cast off any chains of an economic tyranny. An economic system that is predicated on the notion that giving more to the rich somehow helps the poor (contrary to all evidence, by the way) is as tyrannous as the aristocracies of old. The fact that the new aristocrats wear pin-striped suits and are often highly educated doesn't make the system less tyrannous; it just makes it more familiar. In the words of Thomas Paine, "A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of being right." But it isn't right. It is *wrong*.

For decades, we have made the short-term financial gain of corporations—slowly and incrementally at first and ultimately in a huge cascade of democracy-demolishing economic tsunamis—the false god of our day, the idol of our imagination, and the master of our destiny. That is the issue underlying almost every other issue, from endless wars to environmental desecration to economic hardship to a lack of health care and inadequate child care. There is no one to blame so much as something to take responsibility for, a fact to realize, a dream from which to awaken, and actions to take while there is still time.

Whether it's a king lording over us or a corporate donor class exerting undue influence on our government—the economic equivalent of lording over us—the right and responsibility of every generation of Americans is to cast off any chains that bind us.

The moral mission of the United States is to create a so-

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ciety in which, to the best of our ability, all material shackles are removed that keep any person from becoming who he or she was created to be. It is every generation's task to claim that mission, and to further it. The power of our first principles, our democratic values, is that they speak to something higher than politics. They speak to the human condition.

America's higher purpose is not just to allow you to have what you want, or to allow me to have what I want. Our higher purpose is to give everyone a fair shot at making their dreams come true. Anything that stands in the way of that will ultimately deprive all of us of the opportunities we hold most dear. For America doesn't belong to any one of us; America belongs to all of us.

That kind of thinking was radical in 1776, and it's radical today.

It's radical to declare that God created all men equal.

It's radical to declare that God gave all of us unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It's radical to insist that governments are instituted to secure and protect those rights.

And it's radical to insist that our government should be a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

Such philosophical radicalism is our heritage, but it cannot be guaranteed. Once a democracy is established, it cannot be taken for granted. Just as a relationship must be tended to, and

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our bodies must be tended to, and our careers must be tended to in order to thrive, so our democracy must be tended to. Its survival isn't guaranteed. At what point in a flight, once a plane is in the air, can the pilots then afford to ignore the panels in the cockpit? Every citizen is a pilot of our democracy, and if we do not think of ourselves that way, and act that way, then the plane of our democracy goes down.

Devotion to the ideal of democracy is a living force; it needs to be kept alive in our hearts and fostered by our political engagement. Democracy does not drive itself.

As Thomas Jefferson wrote to James Madison in 1787: "I hold it that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical." We rebelled against the tyrannies of slavery, female oppression, and segregation. We rebelled against monopolies and purveyors of child labor. We rebelled against union busters and dangerous work environments. We don't need to summon up some new revolutionary spirit now so much as claim the one that has always been part of us.

Americans remain a rebellious people, but too often our rebellion is misplaced. We expend our spirit of rebellion on relatively minor matters, like a cable company denying us the premium package, rather than on confronting the unholy alliance of government and corporate tyranny. This has got to change, or we will lose something very precious.

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Neither the exceptionalism of our principles nor liberty itself can be automatically bequeathed from parents to children. They must be won and rewon with every generation. No amount of money, political strategizing, or algorithms can substitute for the emotional power expressed by enough people who really care. And that is what the new revolution of consciousness signifies: millions of Americans are now realizing—many for the first time—that when it comes to what happens to our democracy, we really do care.

There has been a stirring of democratic fervor in the United States over the past few years, making it clear that we do: the Tea Party, the Women’s Marches, activism led by students after the mass shooting in Parkland, Florida, uproar over the separation of families at our southern border, and the resistance movement” since the 2016 election. We indeed are heirs to revolutionary forefathers, and at last we are beginning to act that way. Now, at arguably the eleventh hour, a generation that had been on the verge of amusing itself to death has awakened to the fact that there is nothing amusing at all about the death of our democracy.

The Reawakening

A spiritual awakening is necessary to redeem our country, but a spiritual awakening takes courage. And a spiritual awakening takes love.

Some Americans have a hard time loving this country today because they're ambivalent about things that occurred in the past—and even some things occurring in the present that we haven't taken responsibility for. Without a willingness as a nation to become more self-aware, we will not be spiritually awakened. And we will not be able to summon up the emotional and psychological strength to take us to a better place.

It's important that we recognize America's historical errors, not as a reason for national self-hatred, but as a foundation for correcting them. It's true that this country has committed atrocities, from slavery to the genocide of Native Americans to the oppression of women to institutionalized white supremacy to violently enforced segregation to the cruelty of separating parents from their children at our Southern border. But we have also seen the rise—and the success—of the abolitionist movement, the women's suffrage movement, the civil rights movement, the marriage equality movement, and so forth. We should identify our problems, but identify *with* the problem-solvers. We have always embodied a characterological struggle between the most

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illuminated principles and the basest human instincts; that is nothing new. But our historical narrative has been one of ultimately improving things. And cynicism is just an excuse for not helping.

We're both a brilliant country and a country that has made some terrible mistakes. But our pattern has been one in which enough Americans rise up in their time, with power and love for the possibilities they know in their hearts are real, to *right* those wrongs. The problem-solvers of our past didn't act like victims—they proclaimed victory and saw it through. And so can we. They didn't just sit around and make cynical comments, or complain about their exhaustion, or simply yell at those who disagreed with them. Transformational love requires personal maturity. It is convicted and fierce, and so should be our politics. We're not the first generation to be compelled to push back against antidemocratic forces. Let's just make sure we're not the first one to fail.

But we will fail if we keep having the same conversation we've been having for the last forty years—and doing the same things we've been doing for forty years—but pretend things will turn out differently. We must move into a higher level of awareness in order to interrupt the patterns of crisis, for the laws of consciousness are set and unalterable. Merely tinkering with the external effects of our problems will not be enough to solve them. Fear destroys and love creates. An amoral economic system cannot not produce chaos, and love cannot not produce miracles.

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The choice is between chaos and miracles. And the choice is ours.

Again the words of Jefferson:

*I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.**

Now, in the twenty-first century, we must once again keep pace with the times. We need to align ourselves politically with “the progress of the human mind” that marks the realizations of the times in which we live. With a more whole-person approach to everything from health to relationships, we *have* become more developed and we *have* become more enlightened. The biggest problem we have collectively is that our politics lag behind.

* *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, edited by J. Jefferson Looney, Retirement Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), 9:151.

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Our political establishment, too often at the behest of its corporate overlords, cannot but deliver the spawn of its malfeasance. Yet we continue to expect that those who knew how to do things before are somehow the ones who know how to do things now—even when things that they did before were spectacular failures.

Someone who led you into a ditch isn't usually the one who knows how to lead you out of it. So why do we keep looking backwards? "Seasoned politicians" led us into wars in Vietnam and Iraq; "seasoned politicians" created the biggest wealth inequality since 1929; "seasoned politicians" brought us to the brink of environmental catastrophe. Clearly, we need a new kind of seasoning.

Our politics, and our political establishment, remain in the coat that Jefferson referred to as fitting him "when a boy." They continue to act as though money, not love, is the factor that will save us; as though economics, not humanitarian values, is the principle that should guide us; and as though short-term corporate profits, not the people of the United States, should be the primary beneficiary of their largess.

Such thinking is not the light that guides us; it is the darkness that blinds us.

In fact, in order to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century, we must make our love for one another the central factor in all political decision-making. In the words of Martin

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Luther King Jr., “We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools. . . . We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.” We heard those words in the twentieth century, but we need to hear them now in a whole new way. We can no longer afford to think of them as mere metaphor. They are directives that speak to the realities of our time. We need to recognize what they mean—not deny what they mean and simply hope that things work out.

We need to recognize that climate change poses an existential threat to our survival.

We need to recognize that the physical resources of the planet are not unlimited, and that in abusing them we are endangering ourselves and our children’s children.

We need to recognize that the endless application of brute force will not bring peace to the world, and that only the soul force of justice, meaningful human relationships, forgiveness, and compassion can end the scourge of violence on our streets and throughout the world.

We need to recognize that to fail our children is to destroy our future.

A politics that fails to honor the knowing of the heart is a politics that fails the quintessential task of paving the way to a survivable future. Love, not money, should be our new bottom line.

The Power Within Us

Today we are not in the middle of a covert corporate takeover of our democracy; we're in the middle of an overt corporate takeover of our democracy. An establishment that thinks traditional political strategizing alone can override this threat is not as sophisticated as it thinks it is. In fact, it is naive.

The forces of unbridled corporate power are hugely funded, politically savvy, and active on local, state, and federal levels. They don't care if we defeat their candidates in a particular election, because behind that candidate they have several more. They've shown they're not above suppressing votes, hacking machines (or conspiring with those who do), or spreading lies to the American people. Only a massive wave of conscious citizenship, alert to what is happening at every level of our government, can override their nefarious influence.

The conscious citizen is working on more cylinders than the traditional political activist. Not just the power of the intellect, but also the powers of imagination and love, are necessary to overcome the influence of the new aristocracy.

With our imagination, we give birth to new realities. We can envision the world we want and then work back from there. We

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can *imagine* a world at peace, a planet healed, and all sentient beings happy. We can visualize those things and commit ourselves to their manifestation.

When we do, we are confronted by the gap between what we are imagining and what we are currently creating. Is America's foreign policy a prescription for world peace? Are our environmental policies a prescription for a healed planet? Are our education and economic policies a prescription for economic growth for any but a few? No wonder so many people on the spiritual path avoid politics altogether. It's hard to meditate in the morning, then read the newspaper and see how billion-dollar American arms sales and technical support to Saudi Arabia are contributing to the starvation of tens of thousands in Yemen. It's even harder to see when our own leaders confound all efforts to stop the evil. It's hard to watch a beautiful sunset on a gorgeous beach and consider that millions of children in some other part of the country go to school each day in schools that don't even have needed supplies. The cognitive dissonance is painful.

Yet being with that dissonance is important; it is our soul work. The purpose of our lives is to close the gap between what could be and what too often is. Goodness must be willed; it doesn't necessarily happen of itself. It's not enough to not intend to do harm; our moral responsibility is to intend to do good. And then do it.

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That is why it's our responsibility to protest when our nation, with our tax dollars and in our name, does wrong. If we're morally responsible for monitoring our own souls, then we're morally responsible, as well, for monitoring the soul of our nation.

It's not as though the majority of our citizens don't want a peaceful world; of course we do. The problem is that our political and economic systems are not currently placed at the service of that vision. If one's main goal is the attainment of power or the creation of short-term profit, then what is truly peace-creating, loving, behavior is often dropped by the wayside or given short shrift.

The things that in fact do the most to improve our democracy and create peace among us are not the things that make immediate money for our economic overlords. Do we truly want world peace? Then expanding economic opportunities for women and educational opportunities for children, not just profits for military manufacturers, should be at the core of our national security agenda. Do we really want a healthy environment? Then we must stop using the Environmental Protection Agency to shore up profits for fossil fuel companies at the expense of their effect on climate change. Do we really want a long-term healthy economy? Then we should massively realign our investments in the direction of support for health, education, and culture among America's children.

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Old systems do not die willingly, particularly when they control gargantuan amounts of wealth and power. From the dismantling of environmental protections to economic policies that increase the gaps between rich and poor to the destruction of indigenous wisdom and peoples in the name of economic “progress” to the often unthinking extension of our military prowess, we have been moving away from, not toward, the realization of humanity’s highest hopes for life on earth.

Yet we would do well to remember the laws of evolution. Any species behaving in maladaptive ways will either evolve or become extinct. A world in which we habitually and powerfully attack not only each other but even our own habitat, is a world the laws of evolution will not support.

Our species will either evolve to a more heart-centered consciousness, choosing a greater reverence for planet and people, or we will go extinct due to collective behavior that is maladaptive for our survival. No change in government will fundamentally save us unless we are willing to evolve as a species from one with prodigious intellect and technological power but disconnected from its heart to one that puts reverence and devotion and love before all else. As with any other species, our opportunity for survival lies in the presence of an evolutionary alternative, or mutation. For the human species, that mutation is a mutation of consciousness. It is represented by the great spiritual masters who have lived among us, teaching the mes-

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sage of compassion and love. Only a spiritual leap forward will save us from the evils of the world.

The weight of history is on our shoulders now. This year—not next year or the year after that—we are called upon to put aside unimportant things and get to the work of correcting our evolutionary course.