

Chapter 7

In Dire Need of Common Ground

The whole concept of “We the people” implies that “We” are on the same team: united. On the same level. On equal footing. Or at the very least, working together to achieve a common goal. But we all know that “We” has never meant *all of us*. From the very beginning it meant some of us; the privileged few, and more often than not, the rich and white amongst us. It seemed not all of us were the people *that counted*. That said, the fact still remains that today we - and by that I do mean *all of us* - are in this together. By *this*, I mean the American experience. If you claim residence in any one of the 50 states or unincorporated territories that comprise this great nation, then you are included in that experience and you therefore have a substantial stake in the well-being and prosperity of the country.

In order to progress as a society it is imperative that we not attempt to hide behind a veneer of post-racial color blindness. We must simultaneously embrace and rise above our cultural and ethnic differences, and recognize the fact that in every society there are dividing lines; either real or inferred divisions between the haves and have-nots, between those in power, and those without. In some societies those markers are more easily distinguishable by caste systems, feudal ranking, or outright stratification. But in presumptively democratic societies, especially those of Anglo-Saxon majority, like Europe

or America, those distinguishing markers are most easily identified by the color of one's skin.

To notice differences in white, black, and brown skin tones, eye shape, hair texture, and physical build is natural. But to develop and foster hatred, bigotry, contempt, indifference, apathy, or any other kind of bias for an individual based solely on those differences is altogether nurture. It is a choice. And as history has proven time and time again, it is an illogical choice. Irrationality and bigotry lead people to do unspeakable things. They cause leaders and organizations to misinform. They cause communities to foster fear and hatred. They cause individuals to react unreasonably and violently. These things cause logical debate to cease, and bring political processes to a standstill. They cause economies to decline and falter; credit ratings to be downgraded. All in all, irrationality, bigotry, and all of the presumably noble causes they hide behind can be very bad business for society as a whole.

If we are to truly become unified, we must not ignore the growing chasm between the rich and the poor. We must address the exponential growth rate of both the academic and socioeconomic achievement gaps that threaten to create two America's; affluence and opportunity on the one end, struggle, strife and poverty on the other.... It has never been more apparent than now, in today's contemporary America, that education is imperative to survival, opportunity and prosperity. Or that miseducation is as dangerous as no education at all. We cannot afford to allow social and political agendas to reshape and rewrite our history as a nation. We cannot allow religious zealots, lunatics, fanatics, or extremists

of any kind, the opportunity to inflict their sickness on the greater society. Knowledge is power. And as James Madison once said, those who wish to be their own governors must arms themselves with the power which knowledge gives.

When it comes to those whom we chose to lead us through dire times, I think there are several questions that should be addressed from day one of any vetting process. First and foremost, do you believe in the person? That is to say, do you believe in their ideals, which are not to be confused with their beliefs - theologically speaking - but with the statements they make and the issues they champion. Are those same issues consistent with your concept of a prosperous and egalitarian society? Do you believe in their fortitude and character? Can they withstand a fight and emerge victorious; bloodied and battered quite possibly, but valiant and triumphant nonetheless?

Do you trust the individual to get the job done? Can you honestly put faith in the effort this man or woman will make towards accomplishing what must be accomplished? Do they have the savvy, the knowledge, the clout, and the ability to make a dream a reality; from proposal to bill to law. And when answering this question one must weigh in on whether or not you can honestly put this same level of faith in any other candidate. Can you trust this single person above all else to do what is right for the majority - for all of your countrymen, not only the wealthy, or any other contingent which may assume political indebtedness? Does this individual have what it takes to withstand the influence of lobbyists and sycophants, of

politicians and pundits, of fads and movements alike, all in the name of the greater good?

If one can answer in the affirmative when considering those things then I believe it is of much less importance whether or not one believes in a system or a party; in Republicans or Democrats, Conservatives or Liberals, or our political system as we know it. Each of those entities has proven themselves broken and ineffective in today's world. Each too entitled, too encompassing, too engorged on their own hyperbole, and far too corrupt to be corralled into anything which coherently resembles a united front. The system, for all intents and purposes, is broken. So we need not put faith in a system, per se. We must put faith in a leader. We must put stock in ideals. We must dilute the muddied waters of Washington, and make simplified - yet logical and calculated - steps towards progress. What makes sense for most of us, not some of us? What moves the nation forward, as a whole, towards healing and progress? Those are the options which must be seriously and cautiously weighed. Those are the leaders we must support and hold accountable. These are the questions which must be considered before any vote is cast locally, state-wide, or nationally.

United and educated, we stand and progress. Divided, we fall. Ignorant and bigoted, we utterly and ultimately fail.