i love you, too



I'll start out by confessing that Dr. Cornel West largely fell off my radar over the past few years. Mea culpa. Mea culpa *albus*.

I've also been mostly lukewarm on Anderson Cooper for no real reason other than CNN has the worst panel discussions imaginable. But CNN still rocks when there is something big enough to warrant on the ground coverage. Their Black Lives Matter protest coverage from multiple cities has been solid, so we've been dialing in for those few minutes we can stand watching the world burn.

A few weeks ago (May 29), I chanced upon Dr West on Cooper's CNN program. I was knocked sideways by the naked passion and truth of his discourse. It was so raw, so sharp to the bone, that I kept expecting the camera to cut away in mid-sentence.



I've gone on at length about how Your Electric Picture Radio Box Matters, but that has mostly been in reference to fictional affairs and frivolities. The dilution and conformity of televised news coverage, on the other hand, makes it matter barely at all. A bunch of talking heads nattering conventional

wisdom over a ten second b-roll loop of visual popcorn, largely devoid of all but the cheapest mental nourishment.

But this was pure fire coming from the tube. No punches pulled. Cooper looks a bit stunned, but to his great credit he lets West roll. Worth a watch when you have time.

Stanwyck and I were agog. The notoriously cool medium reached flaming hot for a brief moment. And then, naturally, everything settled back down to the standard dozy drone, as along came Cuomo to explain in tedious detail what we were seeing with our own eyes.And often getting it wrong. We soon drifted off to watch something more soothing, like the *Great British Bake Off and Clock Making Show* or the *Teletubbies*.

Last night, we happened upon another encounter between Cooper and West. This teleskypezoom affair, despite the social distancing, was probably the most purely humane and touching exchange I've ever seen on the teevee.

> *I've been at this for over 50 years. And yet, I've got to bounce back. And I will bounce back. The world, white supremacy may make being black a crime. But we refuse to get in the gutter. We will go down swinging like Ella Fitzgerald, Muhammad Ali, in the name of justice.*
>
> *And we do it for brother WyattWyatt is Cooper's newborn son., and we do it for my daughter, we're doing it for the Asians, we're doing it for the whole world. Because that is the only hope of the world and that kind of love is always tragic, comic and cruciform. You gotta get ready to be crucified with that kind of love.*

Cooper was at a loss and fumbled for the right words. A few moments later he choked up and had to pull himself together. West continued:

> *No, we're in it together, Brother and the beautiful thing*

about tears, Socrates never cries, but Jeremiah does and so does Jesus.

We cry because we care. We're concerned. It is not about political correctness or self-righteousness. We cry because we are not numb on the inside. We don't have a chilliness of soul and a coldness of mind and heart.

We cry because we connect, but then we must have a vision that includes all of us and have an analysis of power that is honest in terms of the greed, especially at the top. In terms of the hatred, running amok. In terms of corruption, not just the White House and Congress.

Too much churches, too many mosques, too many synagogues and too many universities, too many civic organizations.

And then the greed in us.

You and I would talk about this all of the time, right? The gangster in us. Because we're wrestling with this day by day and that's why we need each other, my Brother.

Note to self: Get Dr West back on your radar screen.

I was as staggered as Cooper at this point. Lucky for me I did not have several million eyeballs on me. But Cooper is a pro, no question, and he steered toward the customary segment conclusion.

Only to have West say this:

I love you, my Brother.

Have you ever seen a professional talker rendered speechless? Cooper's expression was an exquisite blend of joy, pain, and confusion. What the hell can you say to something like that?

After what seemed like forever, Cooper whispered the only

possible reply.

> *I love you, too.*

Watching the struggle between professional journalist Cooper – who knew damn well that saying such a thing to a polarizing figure like West was surely testing the bounds of corporate tolerance – and the human Cooper was something to behold. Seeing the human side win out was a moment of pure ecstasy.

Despite the loudly proclaimed motto of the blog (see up top), I do not say this as often as I should.Other than to Stanwyck, who must surely be tired of hearing it by now. Three little words. But there are universes within its eight letters. It is disarming. It is generous. It is enveloping. It is hopeful. It is a clear recognition that I am he as you are he as you are me. Coo coo ka choo.

It's love, dammit, the kind that we need more of, the kind that we see in every person out marching peacefully for change right now. The kind we see on every face that is covered by a mask. Not love of self, but love for our Sisters and Brothers. Hope. Decency.

I love you, too. Thanks for reading. It means the world to me.

PS – Here's the clip from last night. It is worth watching. It is also worth noting that CNN edited out the closing moments when Cooper said, "I love you, too," though it does appear in the CNN transcript.

> *In the funeral for George Floyd, there was "not one reference to hatred or revenge. It was all about love and justice," says Dr. @CornelWest.*
>
> *"The Floyd family lifted up that spiritual moral banner in the midst of a moment in which we got all of the lies and crimes." pic.twitter.com/vqKHuHwZyp*

— CNN (@CNN) June 10, 2020

It’s Happening Here



One of the phrases that keeps popping up over the past three and a half years has been some variation on “I never in my life would have imagined…”, followed by a description or photo of whatever daily excess our government has committed as part of its ongoing stumble to authoritarian rule.

I say we simply have to have a better imagination. No matter how bad we think it has gotten, every new day will bring another excess at which we shall gasp and clutch our metaphoric pearls.

It’s happening here.

I know some will accuse me of overstating the case, of amplifying a few unrelated facts into something that is just a fever dream of my addled liberalism. Just as some told me my reaction to the election of Trump was extreme and irrational. Tut tut, silly boy. We’ve been through worse than this.

I admit that my imagination upon the election of Cheeto Don ran riot, that I imagined one preposterous disaster after another during his term, that I imagined a seething subclass of malcontents, racists, and gun nuts taking his election as

license to cosplay their more twisted fantasies. You should see some of the failed fictions in my desk drawer.

My imagination, sadly, fell far short of what turned out to be our new normal. Mea culpa.

Despite the warnings of several astute observers (Sarah Kendzior and Masha Gessen among many), I held out some glimmer of hope that the 'norms' and 'traditions' of American governance would be enough to save us from the arrogance, malevolence, and sheer stupidity that were Trump's most apparent qualifications for national leadership in the first place.

Trump's method is based in his most prevalent personal trait: He's a fuck up. He has failed in almost every venture he has undertaken, but because he has no conscience and no inkling of personal fault, he always manages to extract himself from the wreckage better off than before; it doesn't hurt that he surrounds himself with slavishly devoted functionaries desperate for a little of his gold dust to float their way. From Roy Cohn to Michael Cohen, he's always had "a guy" to take care of his mess. And they always find out too late that he has as much loyalty to them as he does to the guy who gold plates his toilets. Everybody get's stiffed in the end.

So it is with his consolidation of political power. Incompetence is wedded to rank opportunism. There is no pretense to decency. No behavioral norm is safe. And given that he is a congenital fuckup, he inevitably creates another crisis that lends itself to grift and depredation. One after another flunky finds himself roadside with a tire track on his back. Repeat.

I knew Trump was a simpleton bereft of decency. I know he had been a mobbed up petty grifter and conscienceless racial provocateur. I knew all the things about him, just as I knew the rot at the core of the modern GOP and the conservative

movement was perfectly tilled for his brand of resentment and greed to flourish. I had always just figured the decline would continue at a leisurely pace under a Cruz, a Rubio, or a JEB!, more or less nasty, but with at least a whiff of gentility and noblesse oblige to cover the stench.

My imagination failed me.

So here we are. More than 100,000 dead in a pandemic made worse by incompetence and preening ego. An economy in freefall.But hey, the stock market is doing great! Our ability to influence events beyond our borders reduced to almost zero.This may, in fact, be an improvement, historically speaking. The logistics of responding to a pandemic are hard, they tell us. Besides, it's not so bad, just like a flu. We don't have the resources. We don't have the supply chain. We don't have etc. and so on.

Yet somehow we have the ability to mobilize thousands of troops tricked out in riot gear, with full logistic and armored vehicle support, to clear a public park so our president could pose with a borrowed Bible in front of church those troops "liberated" with tear gas and riot gear.And fuck sake, spare me any of that "it wasn't tear gas, you stupid libtard, it was pepper spray." Somehow, we always have the necessary resources to impose order by means of force, wherever in the world we might choose to do so, no matter how much it degrades the situation in the end. But there is never enough money lying around for, oh I don't know, adequate health care for a huge swath of our citizenry or replacing a crumbling school. Hell, we can't even seem to maintain our major airports at a standard equivalent to a Kathmandu bus station.

My imagination failed to warn me that the president would deny that there had been tear gas deployed outside the White House, even though hundreds of people witness that it happened. My imagination totally failed to prepare me for the moment when

his Barbie-esque press secretary compared Trumps awkward fondling of a Bible on the St John church steps as equivalent to Winston Churchill's surveying a bomb rubbled London in WWII. Stop believing your lying eyes, peasants.

It's happening here.

Today, June 4, marks the 31st anniversary of the Chinese governments slaughter of protesters in Tienanmen Square. The world was almost unanimously shocked and revolted by the government aggression. One notable exception was a mobbed up grifter and publicity whore from Queens, NY:

> *When the students poured into Tiananmen Square, the Chinese government almost blew it. Then they were vicious, they were horrible, but they put it down with strength. That shows you the power of strength. Our country is right now perceived as weak…as being spit on by the rest of the world.*
>
> *Playboy Magazine, March, 1990*

Since then, Trump has notably praised dictators across the globe: Erdoğan, Kim, Orban, Xi. And Putin, of course. Especially Putin. Always Putin.

Trump idolizes that kind of pseudo-masculine aggression. As a weak man, he longs to express himself in a manner he believes proves his machismo. His crowing about his sexual assaults. His unsubtle braggadocio about the size of his dick. His calls for cops to "not be so gentle" when they arrest people, calls for protesters to be "punched in the face". His longing for the old days, when men were men, and so on.

Now we have Lafayette Park, really only the latest expression of his power lust, but surely the most transparently autocratic. Lafayette Park has long been considered a 'people's park', and there have been peaceful protests there against every president in my living memory. It's kind of like

our Speaker’s Corner in London’s Hyde Park. Anybody can speak their mind.

Some of those protests involved people camping out for weeks and months to make their cases. Some I agreed with. Some, not so much. Some were, frankly, cranks. But no matter their position, it is our First Amendment right to protest that has been on display, and I say “Hell yes” to these folks with the passion to stand up and speak their piece. And until this week protesters have largely been left in peace.

Contrast this to the armed occupation of the Michigan State House several weeks ago. Where that was all about intimidation and fear – terrorism, in a word – Trump urged Michigan Governor Whitmer to just ease off and let things settle down. As with the torch-wielding white supremacists in Charlottesville, he sees the “good people on both sides” and urges us the let racist bygones be bygones.

But the unarmed, almost entirely peaceful protesters in Lafayette Park expose the weakness and rot at the president’s core. Like most men raised in the poisonous atmosphere of macho America, Trump is terrified of looking “like a pussy”. So he sent combat-attired troops to teach those people who is boss while he waited out the troubles in his underground bunker, a special snowflake’s hidey hole.

As chilling as the scenes in Lafayette Park are to watch – not at all unlike Tienanmen in 1989 or Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring – the scene that gutted me to the core is the one up top of this diatribe.

For me, the sight of fully armed combat troops deployed in formation on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial is an insult akin to what an honestly religious person must feel upon seeing a serial adulterer/thief/liar wave a prop Bible in front of a church.

Like all the monuments on the Mall in D.C., the Lincoln is

typically open to visitors 24/7, every day of the year. I prefer to visit at night, when the shadows make room for visits from the ghosts that inhabit the Vietnam and Korean Memorials. It's as close to sacred ground this atheist knows outside the Village Vanguard.

It is quiet at night, and unlike the daytime throngs of field trippers and such, the people you see there after dark seem to share a sense of reverence for the truly horrible burden Lincoln bore to maintain the Union against the forces of treason and racial subjugation. He was no saint, Lincoln, a fact he recognized as well as anyone. He was a flawed man who bore an unimaginable burden. In the end, he paid the price that racism extracts when it is challenged.

This imperfect vessel knew enough to make a plea to our "better angels" central to his project. Trump's project – much like the Confederacy itself – relies on the baser impulses of greed, cruelty, resentment. Sadly for us all, lesser angels are much easier to rouse.

Trump has imposed an occupation force on the nation's capitol city, something the traitors Davis and Lee could never achieve. There are combat troops and military police and personnel from the Federal Bureau of Corrections trained in quelling prison riots. The Drug Enforcement Administration has been mobilized to surveil the protesters. The National Guard is on the scene. At this point, he needs only an excuse – or an invitation from one of his supplicant Republican governors – to spread these forces into other communities.

It's happening. Here.

Today, on this Tienanmen anniversary, the NY Times published an "opinion" piece by Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton. The headline is enough to catch the drift: "Send In The Troops", but it is worth a read to understand the dark sentiments shared by way too many of our neighbors. It would have fit right in during

the pre-Civil War years when self-righteous plantation owners warned against the inevitable rape of our precious white women if the slaves gain so much as an iota of freedom.

The government, and the halls of business and industry, are filled with Tom Cottons. Handsome, well dressed, educated at all the right schools (even as they decry the corrosive subversion of Ivy League elites). These are the people who call for the elimination of American freedoms in order to preserve their own "freedom" to accumulate wealth, guns, and power. These are the people for whom a request to wear a mask during a pandemic is intolerable tyranny, but who also believe that protesters getting shot in the face with rubber bullets are just getting what they deserve for not following police orders.

I realize the American Dream, the promise of all men created equal and such, is a fantasy built upon the great, original sin of slavery. The nation's prosperity was extracted via the unpaid labor of millions of Black Americans. Our American Dream, the freedom and standard of living that had been a beacon to oppressed people around the world, is a happy face painted on centuries of savage cruelty and greed. The racism inherent in our governance is an entrenched barrier to our progress as a civilized nation. The people protesting in the streets right now – and the people who support them – are demanding that the promise be honored, and that the cancer be removed. Our future depends on their – our – success.

The Tom Cottons of the world demand that these upstarts – us, by damn – be taught a lesson once and for all and that we learn to stay in our place. If we are lucky, resilient, and determined, we might be able to push back against that pressure. If not, nothing in my wildest imagination is likely to measure up to the darkness to come.



NOTE: Not from my imagination. I’m still working on it.

COVIDream #3



A night of fractured scenes, only one cohered in memory.

On a full airliner. We land on the top level of a parking deck.Planes flying through and landing on parking decks are recurrent in the i2b dreamscape.

I am asked to stay seated until everyone is off the plane. As

the last person leaves, my seat has become a chair in a dentist’s office, complete with all the swishy tubes and drills and such.

I look out the window and all the passengers are pressed up against the terminal window to watch my dental surgery. The dentist and nurse are masked and unrecognizable.

Surgery over almost as soon as it starts. Now I am in an airplane seat again. I move to get off when an announcement comes on telling me to take me seat for takeoff. I look out the window and we are now on a parking deck adjacent to the one we landed on.

I buckle in. The plane takes off. I wake with a start when it seems the plane will not clear the office building on ascent.

~ FIN ~

COVIDream #2



In which the nightly escape from our waking nightmare is sometimes not.

I find myself toiling once again in the corporate world, this time an ominous place focused on cyber security.I actually worked for two hi tech security firms along the way. It was very Blade Runner: all black and grey metals with finish

ranging from flat matte to deeply reflective without being at all shiny; black and grey carpet in the usual industrial pattern that is not a pattern; lighting that was more than ample to see and work, but still felt dark; and, that i2b dream staple, the elevator banks that move from place to place of their own volition, and that never seem to take you to the same place twice.

My first day at work. No idea what I am supposed to be working on. I get hungry. Since I don't know anybody – everybody is very standoffish, almost rude about it – I set out to find food alone. There is a very pleasant cafe/tavern next door, or so it seems. Their menu is about 40 pages long, and has lots of lush photos of food that they do not seem to serve. They have a very detailed beer listing, though. However, the joint is part of and for the security company only, and does not serve alcohol during business hours. The company runs 24/7, so, no. I return to HQ, starving, and buy a few chocolatey baked treats and some coffee in the lobby. All the baked treats are chocolate or something else dark, to match the visual aesthetic of the place.

I get on the elevator back to my cubicle. Guy next to me says, "You must be new."

At last, a friendly voice. Sort of.

"Yes, first day."

"Go easy on the muffins. That shit will fuck you up."

Door opens, my new friend disappears. Later, I find out the hard way that, yes, the muffins are laced with amphetamines, anti-anxiety agents, and various other behavioral modifiers.Goody's powder for the cyber age, reckon. But I was starving, so I tucked right in. Yum.

I exit the elevator in what I think is the right place, but nothing looks like where I was before. My cubicle is an

extension of the building vibe: dark, weirdly quiet, and the cubicles are finished in a silken fabric that is almost irresistible to touch, right on the borderline between luxe and creepy. A chair that feels like a massage headed for a happy ending. I also have a fine monitor/speaker system for watching movies – from a company approved list – because, they "don't mind how you spend your time as long as you get your work done".

This area is…different. A bank of harsh fluorescence hangs from a drop ceiling with most of the tiles missing. The cubicles are all beige and tatty. Chairs are wobbly, arms missing, cushion bursting out of torn 'leather'. The biggest difference: nothing but H1-B immigrant workers, mostly Asian or Indo-Pakistani, crammed butts to nuts, wearing headset communicators and staring into old CRT monitors. Typing for their lives. Dressed in black, head to toe. I see a jug at every person's feet: make-do urinals so they never have to leave their desk. Lots of muffin remains and crumbs. One person notices me and stops working to stare. That disruption in the collective flow seems to make everyone stop as one and stare my way.

"Sorry, I'm lost."

The only white guy on this floor walks up to me. Black khakis, black polo with embroidered company logo. Same outfit as the H1B folks, but blacker. Earpiece. Phone and taser on his belt. He steers me back to the elevator, which seems to have moved to a completely different place.

"Be more careful next time. This is a security company. No room for errors."

I get on and press – what floor am I anyway? – 12, why not. The elevator accelerates fast enough to knock me off balance. But it is moving horizontally.Another fixture of 12b dreams: elevators that move horizontally.

I emerge in a different building entirely and on a higher floor than before. Maybe a diagonal elevator? Same aesthetic, but abandoned. Wires hanging from the ceiling, chairs toppled, piles of cubicle pieces. I toss my coffee and wrappers in an overflowing trash can. Very much the setting of the last scene of *Fight Club*. Figure this is not the place for me, so I turn right around to an elevator that is no longer there. Well shit.

Voices in the corridors. I find my way to a cluster of people at yet another bank of elevators. They go quiet. Clearly suspicious and almost hostile. I get on the elevator and hit 7 – that's my floor! hope I'm in the right building!

I emerge to familiar surroundings. My manager – actually a very friendly manager I worked for years back – sees me and welcomes me back.

"Trouble with the elevators?"

She laughs and smiles. Maybe I'm not crazy. She leads me back to my cube. I take an opportunity to ask about my duties.

"Don't worry. We'll get something to you soon enough. Until then, just watch a movie, or read, or nap. Whatever. It's just important that you get here on time. Oh, and there will probably be a lot of required overtime. Nights and weekends. Hope that's okay."

Now Kate and I worked together for a long stretch at a company that got bought and sold many times until someone finally bought and cut it up for parts and tax writeoffs.

"Kate, this is embarrassing. We've had so many owners and name changes, I can't quite remember the name of the company now."

"I know, it's crazy. I forget too. Let's just call it Hell."

And she laughs again, tells me to be sure to be onsite when required, and waves.

“You should try the muffins from downstairs. They’re GREAT!”

Weeks pass. Months, maybe years. I still have had no assignments, no work to do. But the pay is good, and I get to watch movies and such. The nights and weekends are pretty damned annoying, but jobs are hard to come by.

Elevators continue to move around, offices and cubicles don’t stay in the same place for long. I never see Kate again. And I eat muffins all the damn time.

One stretch at work goes on for three straight days. I go home exhausted. Our house is a little company bungalow, one of hundreds exactly alike. I find it boarded up with a police notice on the front door. Crime Scene. Do Not Enter. Investigation Site.

With the company logo at the bottom.

I go back to work. Where else would I go? When I get there, I take the elevator to my cubicle. The elevator dumps me out into the gaggle of H1B workers.

Cops in riot gear have a bunch of the visa employees lined up on their knees. Zip tied. Terrified. A couple of bloody noses.

Cop in those wrap around dude bro sunglasses gives me a chilling grin.

“I told you he’d come back to the crime scene.”

They grab me and start reciting all my crimes. Apparently I am the kingpin of a gang of saboteurs working to undermine global security by infiltrating the Company.

The proof? All that time I spent at The Company when I had no work to do, no reason to be there. Tracking my movements, including suspicious wanderings to parts of the complex where I have no business.

~ FIN ~

Note: This dream spanned several successions of waking and going back to sleep. Usually I can ‘change the channel’ on my dreams by rolling to another side or the like, but not this time. Any wonder I am always tired?