

# Now, Where Was I?



Your Narrator apologizes for the radio silence and the inexcusable five month interval since last I set font to pixel. Mea maxima. I don't know about the rest of you, but it has been kind of a crazy year living in the bubble out from which we have barely poked our masked little heads.

Our life in seclusion has been damn near idyllic. I have Stanwyck and the dogs and an abundance of books and music, and best of all, time to engage them all. But the view from the fishbowl has been terrifying. My position of privilege has never been so starkly lit as I compare my little acre of heaven against the outrages and suffering that mark our world.

I let the blog drop because it felt hopeless and impotent and sadly performative to catalog the atrocities of the wider world as if I had something unique to offer. Everything was being said. Beyond a few notebooks filled with my random scribbles and bemoanments, I have had few words.

(Literally. One of the knock on effects of last year's mad scientist adventure has been a touch of brain fog that manifests most upsettingly as an inability to call up words. For a while this was a real problem, but things are getting better. Still, just last week I was unable to remember what kind of tree we had planted in the back yard. It was right there in front of me. I stared at it forever. Absolutely no idea. Finally, after two days, it came to me during my nightly session of angst: crepe myrtle. How obscure.)

Nightly session of angst, you ask?

Yup. Regular as dawn, only earlier. I'm generally good for an hour or two of dread terror between 3-6 a.m. This is the time when the protective bubble disappears and the full horror of our situation becomes undeniable. So many people are dying, killed by the state either through direct violence or intentional neglect. People are losing loved ones, jobs, businesses. We witness the slow accretion of autocratic power consolidation and the emergence of an American Taliban in firm control of the federal judiciary.

Our kids are navigating a moment where their whole lives should open ahead of them in wondrous possibility. What is their world going to look like? Will we continue – even accelerate – our descent into tribalized enmity? Will we spend the next XX many years worrying about pandemics and theo- and autocratic repression?

Will we continue to be governed by a two-bit grifter from Queens, an incurious lard sack in diapers who refers to himself unironically as a “perfect physical specimen”?

It is no exaggeration that the current regime has been almost preternaturally incompetent and indifferent towards its citizens – at least when it has not been intentionally and efficiently cruel, as with the immigration nightmare. It has been hard to bear witness to this tumbling train wreck, especially since the GOP Senate gave the man\* a pass on conspiring with foreign governments to rig an election.

Once the GOP stamped his get out of impeachment free card, there has been no institutional lever available to stop his impulsive rampages. The judiciary is larded through with enough Federalist stooges to protect him and the DOJ has been effectively co-opted as his personal law firm. All the outraged “I demand...” or “I stand against...” sputterings in the world are as spitballs in the wind. Cable news and the

interwebs are chockablock with that performative nonsense. And whenever I sat down to write a blog post, it seemed that was all I had to offer, too.

So. Silence.

But today is the hinge day, the pivot. The day we start to resume our nation's imperfect march to greater inclusion and decency, to a commonwealth rooted in mutual respect.

Or not.

Last night's recitation of terrors were all about today. As have been, largely, the catechisms of the past several months. I find it no more probable today that Cheetolini will win than I did four years ago. But it happened then and it could happen again.

Even if Biden wins resoundingly, I lie awake wondering if trump will actually leave. The man faces serious legal and financial consequence the second he reverts to private citizenship. The shield of the presidency is all that stands between him and utter ruin. And some of the characters holding his loan notes do not look kindly upon failure to pay. Putin is not some contractor in Bayonne for whom a strongly worded letter from the latest version of Roy Cohn might act as deterrent to aggressive collection methods.

I worry, in the wee dark hours, that our locked and loaded swath of cosplay Rambos and Gravy Seal warriors have talked themselves into believing that their violent fantasies are not only justified, but spiritually ordained. The violence has already bubbled over. The USA isn't Rwanda or Northern Ireland or Beirut, but neither were those places. Until they were.

I toss and punch my pillow at the fact that a good portion of our community still sneers at COVID prevention as either foolish or a Satanic infringement on their God-given right to...well, that last bit is unclear, as inchoate pronouncements

of Constitutional principles – mostly imaginary – are the stock in trade of folks who can say with a straight face that trump is a man\* of integrity who makes and keeps promises.

I twitch myself to sleep despairing that even if we replace the chump, at least 35-40% of our friends and families will continue to fervently believe that Joe Biden is a closet commie, or a pedophile, or a stooge for China or Ukraine or whatever other projection trump flings his way. That without trump, our nation is doomed.

What to do with that kind of madness? What to do when people still believe that the economy is better under trump than Obama? What to do with people hepped up on guns and Fox news and Qanon?

No matter how long I stare at the dark ceiling, I find no answer. I can only grab at a slim reed of hope. And that hope is this: Biden will win, Dems will take both houses of Congress. The new administration will work diligently to reverse the decline engendered by the GOP extremists, much as Obama had to do after Bush the Lesser.

For all Obama accomplished, his 'look forward not back' approach to the malfeasance of the Bush years gave license to the more extravagant depredations of the trump regime. I hope that we will see a thorough house cleaning investigation that calls to account those who have used their connections and power to enrich themselves.

I hope the Democrats will govern aggressively and fairly to remediate at least some of the damage done to our institutions and our common wealth.

I hope beyond hope that we will not have to find out what a second trump term will do to our nation.

And then, having thrashed about for a couple of hours in the darkness, I sleep a fitful couple of hours before I awaken

again in my beautiful little bubble, with my best friend and two doggos all abed and safe.

As I warned, I do not have much to say that is not already out there. At best, many of you will nod along in recognition. At worst, I'm just the bloggy equivalent of a cable news gabbler striving to keep you watching til the next commercial.

Hope it helps at least a little.

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## **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](https://pic.twitter.com/vqKHuHwZyp)*

– CNN (@CNN) June 10, 2020

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## 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 rubble 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 to 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.

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## 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.

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