

Danger or Opportunity?

By Akriti Thavanai

The negative effects of this pandemic are obvious and ubiquitous. However, the positive effects are too. In this time of uncertainty and struggle, an astonishing sense of unity has swept over our nation. Efforts to bring light and joy into people's lives, an unceasing flow of gratitude and thanks towards essential workers, technology working to bring us together in a time when we're physically apart. It's magical, this storybook-like energy of goodness and togetherness that has possessed us. Well, that *had* possessed us.

We've all seen the protests.

At the Michigan Capitol building, hundreds of anti-isolation protesters crowded around; some wearing tactical gear and wielding guns, others with their choice of Confederate flags, swastikas, and nooses. These protesters were dominantly white men. They stood, suited up and gripping lethal weapons, chanting together, endangering themselves and all others they'd get in contact with. They held up memorabilia of the country's most egregious, racist times, speaking out against an apparent violation of their rights. This all as an attempt to intimidate the state into buckling to their demands --- which, by definition, is terrorism.

The most frustrating thing, looking at this as a person of color, is the feeling of "if I did this, I'd be killed." Countless people have commented or tweeted on this topic, the same notion of white privilege letting these men escape without even as much as a slap on the wrist. It's painful to see the lack of retribution towards these protesters, when so many innocent people of color have been punished for essentially, just existing. These white men stood with nooses and bullets and left, free to go home to their families with not another care in the world. There are endless lists of people, *children*, who've done absolutely nothing and ended up dead. But these men, they just got away?

Governor Gretchen Whitmer rebuked the protesters for their deportment at the capitol building, disappointed and shocked by the depiction of "the worst racism" in American history. However, our buddy from the White House had something else to say. "LIBERATE", he told states led by Democrats with similar, smaller protests. "These are very good people, but they are angry...talk to them, make a deal."

Once again, our President tries to play the cool dad, spoiling his bratty children to keep their favor. The behaviour of these protesters is unacceptable, and normalizing it is indisputably wrong. In fact, that's the reason this whole topic, the protest and the White House's reaction, is so unnerving and worrisome. The protest itself felt hostile; but then the White House's response defended it, justified it. So not only is there the racial sense that these white men got away with their exclusive privilege of a long leash of justice, but also this unassuring feeling that such violent, militant events will be part of our identity as a nation. In a time of a million different worries for a million different things, this just got added to the list.

Be that as it may, astounding numbers have come to light, numbers that may just relieve some of that worry. Majority of Americans support the lockdown----a whopping 81%. That's right, folks. America, the country unable to agree between Pepsi and Coke, the Lakers and the Clippers, Cool Ranch and Nacho Cheese, finally agrees on something vital. The poll went out to Democrats and Republicans, Boomers, Millennials, and Gen Z, and the majority of people in all these groups agreed that the lockdown should be sustained even with its damage to the economy. Likewise, in a 2-1 ratio, most Americans said they were worried the restrictions on public activity were lifted too quickly.

Essentially, despite recent antagonism, the American people still stand together, strong. This means that for the most part, people will protect themselves and others, working together to end this pandemic. You know that magical sense of unity we had in the beginning, that *esprit de corps*? All these weeks into the lockdown has challenged it. Despite that, though, it's important to remember that even though it's cliché, we're all in this together. And with a joint effort, this global challenge can be defeated.

To further substantiate this point is the story of Rhonda Shearer, a woman \$600,000 in debt after purchasing and distributing PPE to healthcare workers. She sets up a truck station with supplies outside of hospitals, requiring only a hospital ID to receive free protective gear. Shearer stepped up to help during 9/11, and she's stepped up now. A woman with no medical background and no obligations, earning the appreciation of hospitals all around New York with her selflessness. "We don't just bring supplies," Shearer says. "We bring respect and community."

Shearer's story is one of many to demonstrate the spirit we must aim to maintain throughout this journey. No one is ever really ready for a crisis. But in the words of John F. Kennedy, "When written in Chinese, the word crisis is composed of two characters—one represents danger, and the other represents opportunity." So, America—are we ready to take this opportunity?